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R. BRETNOR & KRIS NEVILLE

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 5, No. 2 AUGUST

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(Erecting a communications tower on Triton; Uranus in background.)

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"It takes all the running you can do," observed the Red Queen, "to keep in the same place."

And so, ever anxious to continue to deserve our *Life*-bestowed title of "Aristocrat of Science Fiction," we keep straining our middle-aged leg muscles to bring you an even greater and more varied representation of the best in modern science-fantasy.

We originally intended never to publish serials, but to have all stories self-contained in one issue. Frankly, we're now inclined to think this was a mistake; too many first-rate works of the imagination are submitted to us in lengths that we just can't handle in one issue and have room left for anything else.

So, in our next issue (out in early August) we'll begin our first serial — and we don't think we could have found a better novel to launch the experiment. It's by Poul Anderson. Mr. Anderson has been writing for a little over six years; in the past year or two he has begun really to hit his stride and emerge — not only as a perceptive, genuinely original thinker — but as one of the *real* storytellers now practicing the craft of science fiction. He has never written anything better, to our taste at least, than THREE HEARTS AND THREE LIONS — a wonderful romantic adventure story of a parallel universe tangent to our own, in which the rigorous application of natural law permits nigromancy, entropic wars between Law and Chaos, and captivating maidens who also happen to be swans, and of how this continuum can fuse with ours in the hour of greatest peril for both.

We will definitely want to know your reaction to this experiment. We do *not* plan on regular use of serials, but we do feel there is good reading in this length, and if you agree, we will be delighted to bring you more.

THE EDITORS

TO BE SURE YOU GET BOTH INSTALLMENTS, FILL OUT COUPON, PAGE 36

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It is all too obvious that certain departments of the modern business establishment have developed into sentient beings who exist solely to harass the bewildered customer. It is equally obvious that nothing whatsoever can be done about this. These evil creatures are essentially rugged individualists. Sullenly ignoring the best drawn charts of industrial planners and efficiency experts, they carefully execute such self-assigned tasks as failing to fill orders at all or shipping them in quadruplicate, losing remittances or crediting them to long dead accounts, and replying to a six-month subscription with seven copies of one issue of the desired journal or issuing a blunt "notice of cancellation because of non-renewal." Young innocents — whose life under the tyranny is yet brief — may argue that science will find a means of liberation. But Messrs. Bretnor and Neville are older and wiser heads — and longer suffering. Their wondrously zany collaboration extrapolates a horrendous time when the whole process of wronging the customer will be carried out by cybernetically controlled maximum inefficiency.

Gratitude Guaranteed

by R. BRETNOR
and KRIS NEVILLE

ON THE MORNING of December 5, Mr. E. Howard Harrison showed up at the processing labs of Cuddlypets Corporation promptly at 8:45. He hung up his coat, scrubbed his hands, and put on his smock, mask, and gloves. Then, as he had every working day for seven long years, he joined the two other surgical technicians who made up his team.

As always, Mr. Olson was sitting on the operating table, singing Cuddlypets commercials in his concrete-mixer baritone:

"Cudd-lee-pets, Cudd-lee-pets,
Snuggle up to Cudd-lee-pets!
They'll love Mom and Dad and you
Like they're GUAR-AN-TEED to do!

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"Tweak their whiskers, pull their fur,
Cuddlypets just grin and purr!
Cuddlypets just purr and grin —
Love and gra-ti-tude's BUILT-IN!"

As always, Mr. Kerfoid was standing across from him, beating time on a sterilizer with his forceps. When Mr. Harrison entered the room, Mr. Kerfoid glanced up, nodded, and winked like a vulture with sand in its eye. Mr. Olson just kept on singing:

"Cuddlytiger's big and classy,
Cuddlypanther's really snazzy,
Cuddlyleopard, Cuddlylion —
YOU can buy them all ON TIME!

"Cudd-lee-pets, Cudd-lee-pets,
Snuggle up to —"

It had been Mr. Harrison's habit to ignore these renditions as politely as possible, keeping his long, tight rectangle of a face carefully averted, and busying himself with minor adjustments to the encephaloscreen, or the disposal unit, or to the little glass cabinet that held their day's supply of Schroeder Bypasses and Dappleby Blocks. On the morning of December 5, however, he did nothing of the sort. Instead, he took three brisk paces to bring himself face to face with Mr. Olson, and snarled, "Shut up!"

Mr. Olson jerked his head back, emitted a hoarse "— Cudd-l —," gasped, and was silent. Mr. Kerfoid dropped his forceps, and said, "Now, now, Mr. Harrison," plaintively several times.

"You shut up too," growled Mr. Harrison, turning on him. "It's bad enough having to waste my time working on these goddam big cats, cats, cats — that's all we get nowadays, is cats — lions, tigers, panthers, jaguars, cougars, ocelots — what'll it be next, I want to know, sabre-tooths?" He confronted Mr. Olson again. "It's so bad I can smell 'em in my sleep."

"I — I don't see how you can," protested Mr. Olson nervously. "We've a swell Cuddlylion at home ourselves. Got him for the kid. He's clean and neat, just like it says in the com — Anyhow, he doesn't smell even a little bit. Uses his little old lion-box every time." He looked toward his colleague for support. "Isn't that right, Mr. Kerfoid?"

"It certainly is," croaked Mr. Kerfoid. "Everybody knows that Cuddlypets are — well, as Dr. Schroeder puts it, they are 'personally dainty.' Besides they're all of them deodorized before shipment. It's the policy of the firm, and a very good policy too, I may say."

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Mr. Olson sniffed. "And anyhow," he said, "it seems to me, Mr. Harrison, that even if you don't like my singing, you might at least have the courtesy not to be offensive about it. Maybe Mr. Kerfoid and I *don't* have our B.S.'s in Cyber-Surgery; maybe we aren't qualified to work on human beings like you say you are — but at least *we* don't let our conduct become *subprofessional*."

As unobtrusively as possible, Mr. Harrison sneaked a glance at the big clock on the wall. Everything, so far, had gone just as he'd planned it, and Mr. Olson had been adequately provoked —

Very deliberately, he allowed an expression of uncertainty to come over his features. "Wh-what do you m-mean, subprofessional?" he stuttered.

Mr. Olson was encouraged. He rose threateningly. "You know damn' well what I mean, Mr. Harrison. If you don't watch yourself, I'll report you to the Association — and likely as not they'll have you degraded. See?"

And at that point, as Mr. Harrison had known it would, the red light above the encephaloscreen flashed on to warn them that their first patient would arrive in just 30 seconds.

Automatically, they slipped their masks up over their faces. Mr. Olson took up his position near the hindfoot and tail clamps. Mr. Kerfoid moved to the clamps at the frontfoot and head end. Mr. Harrison, grinning under the gauze, clicked the trephining saw and the encephaloscreen pickup into place.

Right on the dot, the overhead conveyor trap opened, and down came a fine young male lion, snoring away under profound anesthesia, and displaying a small tonsured area just over his forehead. Mr. Olson and Mr. Kerfoid snapped the clamps. Mr. Harrison pressed the button that lowered the foot of the table. Mr. Olson made his incisions, hinging back a few square inches of scalp. Mr. Kerfoid let the saw buzz for a moment, and lifted a section of skull with his forceps. Then Mr. Harrison adjusted the pickups until the encephaloscreen diagrammed the precise path for his instruments. He reached for the delicate electronic scalpel with which Stage One was performed, moved it along the division between the two lobes, noted its indicated position on the screen, and —

"Ta-da-dum, ta-da-dum,
Tada-tada-ta-da-dum —"

sang Mr. Olson cheerfully.

Mr. Harrison's hand stopped.

"Ta-da-ta-da-ta-da-dum,
Tum-tum-tum-tum-tum-tum-tum."

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Mr. Harrison rested hand and scalpel on the lion's nose, frowned, and said, "*Please!*" with great self-restraint.

"Can't I even hum?" protested Mr. Olson. "I was just humming. I didn't even say the words."

Mr. Harrison went back to his labors. He completed Stage One and Stage Two, took the Schroeder Bypass which Mr. Kerfoid had broken out of its sterile plastic capsule, waited while its number was recorded together with his own and the lion's, and installed it. By the time Dr. Schroeder and Dr. Dappleby entered the room on their routine morning inspection, he had completed Stages Three, Four, and Five, and was ready to put in the Dappleby Block. Mr. Olson had hummed the Cuddlypets tune twice more, and had whistled it once.

As always, Dr. Schroeder and Dr. Dappleby walked round the table and stopped beside Mr. Harrison. Dr. Schroeder patted the lion's cheek with a long, hairy hand. "Soon," he chirped, "you will be a *good* little lion. Soon you will lie down with the lamp. It is the Schroeder Bypass that does all this, gentlemen — yes, indeed. It conditions the animal to feel permanent gratitude — *gratitude*, gentlemen. Ah, yes, and we mustn't forget the Dappleby Block, must we? It was so clever of Dr. Dappleby to invent it, so that our nice little friends can't get *too* grateful and hurt people."

Dr. Dappleby's ears turned red, and he mumbled that it really wasn't anything much. Mr. Kerfoid said loyally that it was too. Dr. Schroeder made his usual remark about the good work they were doing, and how it made him feel all warm inside and not at all sorry that he and Dr. Dappleby had abandoned the most lucrative veterinary practice west of the Mississippi to start the Cuddlypets Corporation.

"I know *just* how you feel, Dr. Schroeder," declared Mr. Olson sentimentally. "It's inspiring, that's what it is. Every time I see one of our TV shows, well, I'm grateful to you for the chance of working here." He glanced at Mr. Harrison. "And our commercials — say, they're really *sharp*. They really stay with you. Did you hear that swell one last night?"

Dr. Schroeder said that maybe he hadn't. Mr. Harrison tensed slightly.

Mr. Olson threw back his head and sang:

"Cuddlypets are clean and tidy,
Cuddlypets don't need a didy.
Junior's ooky? Junior's wet?
Trade him for a CUDD-LEE-PET!

"Cudd-lee-pets, Cudd-lee-pets,
Snug —"

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"SHUT *UP!*" Mr. Harrison bawled: He took two long steps toward Mr. Olson. Then, with a roar like an unprocessed Cuddlypet, he leaped for his throat. Together, they fell against the little glass cabinet, sending it crashing down, sending a shower of Schroeder Bypasses and Dappleby Blocks into the funnel-shaped sink at the bottom of which the jaws of the disposal unit whirred hungrily.

It took a minute or two to separate them, to restrain Mr. Harrison, and to restore some sort of equilibrium. Dr. Schroeder was the first to regain his poise. "*Well!*" he said. "You have attacked Mr. Olson. You have destroyed our valuable bypasses, our valuable blocks. You have spoiled our system of records completely! I'm really afraid that we can't keep you."

"Cow-mechanic!" spat Mr. Harrison.

Dr. Schroeder scarcely blinked at the insult. "The fact that you are qualified to operate on human beings," he explained, "cannot change my decision. Since the new psychiatric techniques made you unnecessary, you B.S.'s in Cyber-Surgery are a dime a dozen — a dime a dozen, Mr. Harrison. Besides, you are emotionally unstable, are you not? Maybe you need a Schroeder Bypass yourself. Now Dr. Dappleby will finish this lion, and then I will send another man to your place. Go away."

Mr. Harrison stamped to the door. He threw his mask down, and kicked it into a corner. "Nuts to you, monkey-plumber!" he shouted. "I *quit!*"

Fifteen minutes later, he left the Cuddlypets building by the front entrance, his last check in his wallet. His professional status was doomed; his career was ruined — but there was a new spring in his walk. What was that crack of the doctor's about needing a Schroeder Bypass himself? He chuckled. He felt in his pocket. There it was, safe in its small plastic capsule — *unrecorded* — just as he'd planned from the start.

"Cudd-lee-pets, Cudd-lee-pets,
Snuggle up to Cudd-lee-pets —"

sang Mr. Harrison happily as he went away.

Mr. Harrison disliked cats much more than he did singing commercials, and he disliked cats actually present more than cats at a distance. Now that professional pride was no longer involved, he scarcely objected when his wife watched her favorite Cuddlypets program each evening, and often he came in and watched it himself — at least until it reminded her of their problems, and of his own plans, about which she was doubtful.

It was just three weeks later, on the day after Christmas, that these plans finally came to fruition. The program ended, and Mr. Harrison switched off the set. Nodding critically, he remarked, "Well, I don't like cats — but

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that was pretty good. That was *rich* — the part where the door was going to open, and he didn't know who would come out."

"In the *story*," replied Mrs. Harrison, pursing her over-ripe lips, "it ended right there. You never did learn who it was, the lady *or* the tiger. Of course, it's a very old story, maybe pre-Twentieth Century, when the tigers were fierce and ate people up. So he *couldn't* have turned out to be just an old Cuddlytiger, not really, and *both* of them couldn't have come out. Anyway, I think it's better the way it was written. I think they ought to be left the way Nature made them, in the jungle and all — though at least you *were* a professional when you were doing the work, and I must say no one in *my* family has ever been *sub*professional before. That was why they all said I ought to have married Elmer Maginnis, because he was a real Ph.D."

Mr. Harrison sighed. "Look, Chickadee," he said patiently, "I've explained till I'm blue in the face. It's just for a while. The world owes me something — me, a Cyber-Surgery B.S., working seven years in a goddam cat factory, making 'em grateful!" He snorted. "Well, a Schroeder Bypass'll work just as well in an electronic brain as it will in a cat's. Those cheap poodle-fixers don't know it, but I do. That's why I'm working for Jonson, Williamson, Selznick, and Jones. One of these days, they'll send me on just the right job. Then we'll live off the fat of the land."

"Well, I suppose you know best," his wife said, "but I can't for the life of me see how a mechanical brain can be *grateful* even if you do something for it. And this morning I met that frowzy Eppinger woman — she tries to make out she's thirty-three, but she's forty at least — and she said, 'I hear your husband's a *mechanic* now, Mrs. Harrison, on mechanical brains? Now, isn't that *nice*.' And I said —"

Before she could finish, the phone rang in the hall; and Mr. Harrison, grumbling, pushed into his slippers and went off to answer it.

She heard him snap, "Hello, Harrison speaking." Then, after a moment, in a much sweeter voice: "We're *fine*, Mr. Selznick. A fine Christmas, too. Yes, *sir*, yes indeed. . . . *Who?* . . . Sure I know where they are! . . . Yes. . . . Yes, sir, right now, right away. . . . Thank *you*, Mr. Selznick. Goodbye."

He strode back. "Guess who that was!" he crowed. "It was Mr. Selznick, that's who it was. Babe, our troubles are over. This is *it*."

"This is what?" Mrs. Harrison asked.

"The big chance. We won't have to wait. Say, isn't it lucky he called me instead of one of the others? I'll bet you can't guess where it is."

"Eberhard," Mrs. Harrison said, "stop beating around the bush and come to the point."

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"Ha!" Mr. Harrison strutted. "Well, I'll tell you. It's Moss-Eagleberg, Chickadee. *Moss-Eagleberg*, the biggest store in the West. Forty-six floors. They sell tailor-made suits and new cars, turbocopters, crown jewels and ermines and things, the best Scotch you can get, Oriental rugs, real antiques, pheasants already cooked by French chefs, swimming pools, readymade barbecue pits — They sell *everything*."

"Their prices are always too high," Mrs. Harrison said. "I like Monkey Ward's best."

"And they're *fully* automatic — order, accounting, and shipping departments all run by one brain. *One* — just like a lion or tiger or something. And now it's gone dead — and I'm the guy who's going to fix it." Mr. Harrison danced three steps of a jig. "Get it, honeybunch? After tomorrow, that great big Moss-Eagleberg brain will be grateful to *me*. We'll pick up the phone and order whatever we want — all for free."

"Well, you make it sound very nice, but I still don't see how a lot of condensers and things —"

"It's a cinch," Mr. Harrison said, reaching for his troubleshooter's kit and his hat. "I won't even have to put in a Dappleby Block."

Deep inside Moss-Eagleberg's broken-down brain, Mr. Harrison spent most of the night doing what Jonson, Williamson, Selznick, and Jones paid him to do. In the whole vast, silent warehouse, there was no one to bother him; and, as he worked, he made mental notes. *Order Record*, *Delivery Record*, *Charge Debit*, *Collection Routine* — all these could be by-passed just as if they'd been labelled *Aggression* (*against Human*), *Aggression* (*against Animal*), *Hunger* (*for Human*), *Hunger* (*for Animal except Syntho-horse*). That was simple. Of course, the *Semiannual Inventory* circuits would take a little finagling —

At 6 in the morning, Mr. Harrison climbed the ladder to the control room. He locked the door just to be on the safe side, plugged a mike and a typer in on the *Charge Accounts* bank, tapped out his name and address, gave himself a Triple-A credit rating, and activated the unit. He repeated name and address into the mike so that the brain could record his individual voice pattern for future identification over the phone. He went down the ladder again and traced out the new circuit. Then, expertly, he installed the Schroeder Bypass where it would do the most good, running 56 fine little tantalum wires to the grafting points on its gelatinous skin, and attaching all the appropriate shunts.

"Love and gra-ti-tude's BUILT-IN!" sang Mr. Harrison triumphantly as he went back to his work.

By 8 o'clock, when the two subprofessionals who kept tab on the brain

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showed up, he had it all finished and was seated in the control room writing his bill.

They came in, a plump, pink little man and a long, lean, leathery one. "Hi," said the long one. "I'm Winkler, and this here's Swartz. You get everything fixed?"

Mr. Harrison looked up coldly. "I am *Mr.* Harrison," he informed them. "Repairs have been made, and I'll have the bill ready in a minute or two if I'm not interrupted."

"Sure, sure," Swartz said. He inspected the room, nodding and rubbing his hands. He patted the panels. He stroked the master switch gently. "Boy, oh boy. It sure will be good to have old Bessie perking again."

"Eleven hours at $12.20 an hour," Mr. Harrison muttered, "makes $134.20."

"Worth every cent of it, too," Winkler asserted. "Mr. Harrison, you done wonders. I tell you, Swartz and me were real worried when we found out about it. We thought she was just dead and gone, like a person. We felt like we'd killed her."

Mr. Harrison tore off the original bill and two carbons. "That's all nonsense," he stated. "Giving this brain a name doesn't make it at all like a person. It's an electronic device, and it's very much simpler even than a Cud — even than an animal's brain, let alone a human's."

"You don't know Bessie." Swartz shook his head. "She's got 10,000,000 units, and she thinks a thousand times faster than we do. She's a real personality, Bessie is."

Mr. Harrison reached for his wrenches and printed circuits and blob-like germanium transistors. He put his graphite pencils in the tray and his two pocket meters in their receptacles and snapped shut his kit. "You're wrong," he said flatly. "But I won't waste time arguing with you. Machines can't think. They don't live. They can't die. And that's final."

"I don't see how you can say that," Winkler protested. "Look here. When Swartz cut all the current off Bessie Christmas Eve, wasn't she exactly like a dead human, except for decaying, I mean? Just now it took you nearly twelve hours to bring her back to life, didn't it? Seems to me that was the same as artificial respiration, or heart massage maybe."

"It was just unit by unit shock. There's no connection."

"There!" Swartz exclaimed. "Didn't I tell you? It was *shock therapy.* Bessie does too think. I've worked with her from the start. *I* ought to know."

"Then you ought to know never to cut the current all the way off," Mr. Harrison snapped.

Winkler and Swartz looked at each other. "She needed the rest," Swartz explained patiently. "That new unit they put in to send individual Christ-

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mas cards to the customers worked her to death on top of the holiday rush and all. Besides, it was Christmas Eve."

"When you get through the day, set the dial on 'Stand-by'; *never* cut the current all the way off," Mr. Harrison said through his teeth.

"Since we carry cards for *every* occasion," observed Winkler, "she ought to be grateful we only make her send them out once a year. Don't you think so?"

Most of the circuits in Mr. Harrison's mind were busy with thoughts of the Schroeder Bypass, and the very extensive Moss-Eagleberg stock, and how to get home in a hurry. Now, however, he came up with a jerk.

"She — she ought to be *what?*"

"*Grateful,*" Winkler repeated obligingly. "She sometimes is. You can feel it."

"God damn it, machines *can't* be grateful!" shouted Mr. Harrison, waving his arms.

"Bessie can," Swartz told him. "She'll be grateful to you too, Mr. Harrison, for bringing her back from the dead like you did. She'll love you for that." He reached for the master switch; pulled it all the way down. "You just wait and see."

Conveyor belts came to life from one end of the giant warehouse to the other. Under Bessie's direction, mechanical arms sorted packages, loaded them on the right belts and unloaded them at their destinations. In the delivery and mailing room, address stencils dropped in flawless order from the rotating customer drums, and steel arms slammed the stencils against oncoming crates and cartons, and machine-guided brushes applied smears of stencil ink, and the moving belts carried the crates and cartons away to waiting driverless trucks.

At this evidence of Bessie's revivification, Winkler blew his nose sentimentally; Swartz dabbed at his eyes. Neither of them even noticed Mr. Harrison hurrying out.

Mr. Harrison drove through a red light and two stop signs before he completely convinced himself that neither Winkler nor Swartz suspected the presence of the Schroeder Bypass; that their talk about gratitude was purely coincidental. He remembered that subprofessionals were all stupid bastards, with compulsions to personalize their machines, to — he fished for the word — to *anthropomorphize* them. Yes, that was it. Stupid bastards. The very idea of a machine that was grateful, all by itself, was absurd. It was laughable.

Mr. Harrison was still chuckling when he reached his apartment. His wife had their breakfast unpackaged and ready; and, over their coffee, they

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thumbed eagerly through the latest edition of the four-inch-thick Moss-Eagleberg catalog. There were things for every conceivable purpose and purse, from every conceivable part of the world. There were even a few souvenir ashtrays and lampbases made out of pumice brought back at terrific expense from the Moon.

"Number 62-A-547-01," Mrs. Harrison read aloud. "Rope of pearls, triple strand, fine Oriental. N-ninety-nine thousand, five hundred. Now, that would be *nice*."

"Don't bother reading the price, ha-ha." Mr. Harrison laughed. "*We* can afford it."

"62-C-202-49, Ring, emerald, 32 carats." She held up her hand, crooked the ring finger, and sighed. "Well, I'll note them both down for later — when we've made sure, that is."

"Chickadee, we *are* sure."

"I'm not," Mrs. Harrison said. "So we'll just buy a few things at first, things we can pay for if something goes wrong and they send us a bill. Anyhow, it's near the end of the month, and we'll find out in four or five days."

A few minutes later, Mr. Harrison called up Moss-Eagleberg's charge department. He gave his name and address. Bessie checked against his recording; okayed it. The human operator said, "Your circuit is open now, sir. You can dial your order." And, very carefully, he dialed the catalog numbers: a big tri-di TV set, a Chinchilla trimmed hostess gown, a flacon of *En Chaleur No. 5*, a silver service for eight, a banquet for two with ortolans, truffles, and other strange goodies from the Rotisserie, a case of champagne, and a box of expensive cigars.

They didn't have to wait long. At 11:15, the delivery port in the hall buzzed its warning, and cartons and packages began to come out. As they appeared, Mr. Harrison opened each one and checked up on its contents. Every item was there. In fact, there were two tri-di sets.

"My finger must've slipped dialing that one," he remarked. "Well, no harm's done. Anyhow, it works just as I told you. I'll hang onto my job for awhile so nobody'll get any funny ideas, but from now on Moss-Eagleberg's going to support us in style. Let's celebrate!"

They celebrated right through the weekend, enjoying their champagne hangovers thoroughly, and spending almost as much time over the catalog as in watching their new tri-di sets. They celebrated all over again on New Year's Eve. Then, as the first days of January went by without any bill, Mrs. Harrison began to say less and less about what might happen if something went wrong, and to think more and more about a future of opulent ease provided by Bessie.

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On January 10, unable to wait any longer, she phoned Moss-Eagleberg, asked for a statement on her husband's account, and was informed that no purchases had been made. When he came home that evening, she had her new shopping list all made out.

"I want you to order all these things in the morning, Eberhard dear," she told him. "It's too soon after Christmas to buy jewelry and clothes; they'll be almost sold out. So this time I'll simply get things for the house: a grand piano, a Louis the Something-or-other bedroom suite, and a dear little electronic organ, and new curtains all around, and a freezer, and a real antique spinning-wheel, and a marbletop dresser, and — oh, and all *sorts* of things."

"Better not go getting too much big stuff," Mr. Harrison warned, "at least not at one time. It won't come up through the port; the janitors'll have to bring it in the service elevator. We don't want them getting suspicious."

"Don't worry," Mrs. Harrison said. "I've thought of all that. We aren't going to order more than once in two weeks, even things like our meals. If the police found it out, goodness knows what they'd do! They'd probably use that psychiatric technique on you, the one that made cyber-surgery on people out of date. Then where would we be?"

Mr. Harrison laughed. "I'd be sort of a zombi. I'd be just like a Cuddlypet only more so. But they'll never find out because Bessie won't tell them. She loves me too much, ha-ha-ha! It's BUILT-IN!"

Next day, just before noon, the delivery came through. As the smaller objects were being stacked up in the hall, the telephone rang; and Mr. Harrison, breaking off the catchy commercial he was humming, answered it.

"Hello? Mr. Harrison?" The building manager sounded a little upset. "We've got a raft of stuff for you down here, Mr. Harrison. You — you want to come down?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Quandt. Just send it up."

"*All* of it?"

"Of course, all of it!" Mr. Harrison snapped. "Why shouldn't you send all of it up?"

"Well, okay if you say so. If you can figure where to put *three* grand pianos in that apartment of yours, I guess it's your busi —"

"What's that? *How* many pianos?"

"Three, Mr. Harrison, like I said. The store must of made a mistake."

Mr. Harrison covered the mouthpiece. "They — they sent *three* grand pianos," he said to his wife.

"Well, we'll have to send two of them back."

"We — we *can't* send them back, Chickadee. There'd be too many ques-

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tions. My God, we can't even sell them! We'll have to fit them in someplace, that's all. I — I must've dialed a three instead of a one when I ordered. That must've been it. Whew!" He turned back to the phone. "There's been no mistake, Mr. Quandt," he declared a little too loudly. "I checked with the wife. She — she likes music a lot."

The Harrisons put the three grand pianos in the living room, where they took up eighty percent of the space. They hoisted the tri-di TV's onto one of them, and the spinning-wheel onto another; and they squeezed the organ into the bedroom between the new bedroom set and the marbletop bureau. The next time Mr. Harrison ran into Mr. Quandt in the hall, he dropped a hint that his wife had these *moods* when she had to be humored; doctor's orders, he said. And he made up his mind to double-check every digit he dialed in the future.

As for Mrs. Harrison, she accepted the crowding philosophically. When she wasn't out window-shopping at Moss-Eagleberg's, she kept herself busy making out and revising her lists, running happily through such compositions as "Pretty Redwing" and "The Golliwog's Cakewalk" on her pianos, and regretting that she couldn't tell that frumpy Eppinger woman about Bessie.

On January 24, they ordered again, and again Mrs. Harrison put off getting her jewels and her wardrobe. "You order this time," she said. "All I want is one of those iridium-mink coats, and some silver things for my dresser, and a little more perfume, so it won't matter much if you do make another mistake. But when I get the really valuable things, I want to do it myself. Now that I think of it, you always do seem to get the wrong number when you phone."

When the order arrived, "There!" she cried out. "Didn't I tell you? I said *one* iridium-mink coat, and you went and got *four*."

"I'll be damned," Mr. Harrison said. "I could've sworn I dialed that right. If I didn't *know* that machines simply can't —" He shrugged. "Well, anyway, it's lucky they had four in stock."

Then, without protest, he called up Moss-Eagleberg and arranged to have Bessie record his wife's voice so that she could charge against his account — and he warned her not to order a thing for two weeks at least.

Mrs. Harrison assured him that she wouldn't, adding that he needn't worry about *her* dialing half-a-dozen when she meant only one; and she kept her promise for all of five days. On January 29, though, she happened on an ad in the paper where it said that Moss-Eagleberg were having a sale on star sapphires, up to 30 per cent off the regular price. Even though she knew there wouldn't be any charge, somehow she couldn't resist it.

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Giving herself the excuse that she might as well charge the next order of food now as later, she picked out a medium-sized stone of about eighteen carats and circled its number. She dialed it last, very slowly and carefully.

When the delivery arrived, Mrs. Harrison hurriedly searched for the one little package. Not finding it, she controlled her impatience and began checking off all the boxes of food by their numbers. When she had moved every one of them into the kitchen, she found one package left. But it wasn't a small one. It was about four feet high, and exceedingly heavy. Her heart fluttering, she tore off the paper and exposed a big wooden box with ELL-AY ARTYCRAFTS, INC. stencilled on the side. She obtained a screwdriver, and pried off the top, and exposed a combination sundial and birdbath in genuine simulated bronze, with fat cherubim peeping up over the edge, and North, South, East, and West marked with arrows, and a motto cut into the rim: *Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense.*

Mrs. Harrison sat down. She wept for two solid minutes. She tried to remember whether she could have made a mistake on the very first number of the sapphire. Then, straining mightily, she pushed the birdbath-cum-sundial into a closet and covered it up. When her husband came back from work, she said nothing about it.

Four days later, she made another try for the sapphire. This time, she received several pairs of long winter woolies, size 50 long stout. A little hysterically, she hid them back of the birdbath, and said not a word.

On February 5, the telephone broke up her afternoon nap. When she answered it, a feminine voice sang loudly and clearly:

"Happy birth-day, to you-u-u,
Happy BIRTH-day to you-u-u,
Happy BIRTH-DAY, dear Eber-hard,
Happy birth-day to YOU-U-U!"

And, within half an hour, something arrived from Moss-Eagleberg — a huge, heart-shaped box of candied fruit with WON'T YOU BE MY VALENTINE? across the outside. As the day was neither Mr. Harrison's birthday nor St. Valentine's Day, she deduced that her husband was playing a joke, and she mentioned it to him on his return.

". . . and it seems to me," she concluded, "that you'd be *above* things like that, especially after lecturing *me* on not ordering so often. All that candied fruit — it'll take weeks to eat up!"

After the initial shock of the news, Mr. Harrison had decided, logically enough, that Winkler and Swartz were trying to prove to him that Bessie was grateful. This, however, was hardly a subject he wished to debate with

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his wife, so he simply assured her that he hadn't ordered a thing, that he was as puzzled as she was.

"Nonsense!" cried Mrs. Harrison shrilly, still unnerved by the birdbath and the long underwear. "I refuse to believe it. And you aren't being funny at all. I'm sure Elmer Maginnis wouldn't ever have stooped to being so — so *childish*. Don't you dare to do it again!"

When they retired that night, she was still very angry; and the events of the following day did nothing at all to mend matters. The telephone rang. The feminine voice sang its message. Presently, Moss-Eagleberg delivered a pair of large potted cacti.

Mr. Harrison's protestations went unheeded. His wife turned the Cuddlypets program up louder than ever before, and ignored him icily. He began to wonder whether he hadn't better do something about Winkler and Swartz.

Next morning, he stopped wondering. As it was Saturday, he answered the phone himself. He heard its gay greeting. An hour or so later, after reading the card enclosed with the package, he unwrapped one dozen athletic supporters. On the card was a drawing of a woman in uniform, and under the drawing were the words: *Lots of Love to my Aunt in the Service.*

Mr. Harrison decided that on Monday he would approach Winkler and Swartz and take drastic action.

Mrs. Harrison also reached a decision. With Eberhard making such a fool of himself, there was no point in *her* waiting for the good things of life. On Monday —

On Monday, just before lunch, Mrs. Harrison ordered a score of the most expensive items in the jewelry department. She also dialed a small but select wardrobe of the sort which might have been chosen by a particularly wealthy and generous maharajah's favorite wife. As she hung up, she told herself reassuringly that in no previous delivery had there been more than a single mistake, and that one mistake now wouldn't really make very much difference — though she did hope it wouldn't be on the rope of pearls, triple strand.

At about the same time, Mr. Harrison sneaked out of the office of Jonson, Williamson, Selznick, and Jones, and went to a pay phone. An angry gleam in his eye, the phrases with which to demolish Winkler and Swartz all set in his mind, he called up Moss-Eagleberg and asked for Bessie's control-room. As soon as it answered, he shouted, "Winkler? Winkler, you listen to me —"

"*Who* you want?" shouted the receiver back at him.

"I want *Winkler*."

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"Not here."

"Okay then — Swartz."

"*Who?*"

"*Swartz!*"

"*He ain't here neither!*"

"THEY GO OUT TO LUNCH?" Mr. Harrison bellowed. "WHEN YOU EXPECTING THEM BACK?"

"THEY WON'T *BE* BACK!" bawled the receiver. "THEY BEEN *TRANSFERRED.* THEY'VE WENT OUT TO *DALLAS!* GOD-DAMMIT, *STOP SHOUTING!*"

Mr. Harrison stopped shouting. His stomach felt as though it had suddenly passed through a very cold wringer. He said, "H-how long ago?"

"Three weeks!" barked the phone.

Mr. Harrison groaned. He replaced the receiver, and staggered away from the booth. He found his way to a bar, and had two double bourbons. Then he went back to Jonson, Williamson, Selznick, and Jones, and pretended to work for the rest of the day. He thought of the Valentine present and the cacti and the athletic supporters. He wondered whether his wife might not have ordered them all for a gag, and decided against it. He remembered what Winkler and Swartz had said about Bessie, and cursed both of them for a pair of dumb bastards. Finally he recalled that sometimes a new Cuddlypet took awhile to adjust — that a couple of months might go by before the Schroeder Bypass stabilized properly. It was pretty rare, but it happened. Maybe —

By the time he got home, he had persuaded himself that something like this had happened to Bessie, that all he and his wife had to do was sit tight for another few weeks and it would all straighten out.

"Hello! Hello-oh!" he called as he opened the door. "Chickadee, I'm home."

He halted abruptly. The hall was full of crates, cartons, boxes, and bundles. Some had been opened, wholly or partially; others were intact. Some were small; some were big; several were simply enormous. And there were more of them showing in the visible part of the living room.

"H-Honeybunch?" Mr. Harrison called in alarm. "Where *are* you? Hey, Chickadee!"

He was answered by a loud and very moist sob from the bedroom. There, stretched out on the Louis-the-Something-or-other bed, he discovered his wife. Dashing in, he tripped over a tangle of paper and string on the floor, swore, sat down on the edge of the bed, put an arm round her. "Sweetheart!" he cried. "Mignonetta! What's happened? What's *wrong?*"

Mrs. Harrison quaked. She shook off his arm. She sat up, revealing a

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very red nose and some badly eroded makeup. "What's *h-happened?*" she wailed. "Wh-what's *wrong?* Just l-look what you *di-i-id!*"

She pointed, and a new freshet of tears came forth. Mr. Harrison, following her finger, beheld a dark cylindrical object partly concealed by the wrappings over which he had stumbled. He lifted it out. It was about two feet high, leathery, hollow, and more than ten inches across.

"I j-just dialed some jewels and a f-few things to wear — and *loo-o-k* what I got. Ei-*eighteen* of them!"

Mr. Harrison looked. He saw that, down at the bottom, the object splayed out very slightly into four recognizable toes. He lifted the tag. On one side it said, CONGO NOVELTIES, *Original! Exclusive!;* on the other, HIPPOPOTAMUS FOOT UMBRELLA STAND, *Guaranteed Real.*

Mr. Harrison let it slide to the floor. He peered at his hands, found they were shaking, put them away in his pockets. "Hippo feet," he muttered aloud, "for umbrellas. Must be a mistake. That's what. Just a mistake."

Mrs. Harrison threw herself back on the pillow with a shrill cry of anguish.

"— ha-ha-ha! Machines make mistakes all the time. No harm done, ha-ha! Be all right. Yes, indeed. Don't you worry." He patted her clumsily. He went out. He attempted to take a brief inventory. Besides the eighteen hippopotamus feet, he found a bale of peat moss, a turret-top lathe, two lobster traps, a case of Adventist hymnbooks, five or six crates of lettuce, a hayrake, a portable duck blind with decoys, a small Japanese automobile, and a cage containing a family of Belgian hares.

At that point, definitely dazed, he gave up and went back to the bedroom. Mrs. Harrison was sitting up. She had dried her eyes, and looked combative.

"*S-something* went wrong," Mr. Harrison mumbled.

She did not reply.

"M-maybe I ought to have put in a Dappleby Block," he continued, "Chickadee, maybe that's what —"

"Don't you Chickadee me, you — you *beast!*" Mrs. Harrison leaped to her feet. "*I'll* tell you what's wrong! That mechanical brain or whatever it is — that thing you call Bessie. She *loves* you! She loves you — and she's jealous of *me!* That's what's wrong. When you ordered the piano, she sent you two extras. It was the same with the coats, because it was you. But whenever *I* ordered something, just look what I got — rabbits and birdbaths and hippopotamus feet!" She stamped on the floor. "Well, you just get all that junk out of my house, do you hear? Send it back to your Bessie. Oh, if you could've seen the look on that Mr. Quandt's face when they brought it all up! Like — like we'd *stolen* it! Oh! Oooh, Eberhard dear, what will we *do-o-o?*"

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She collapsed on his chest. Again she burst into tears. They clung to each other. Presently, between sobs, "That awful m-machine," Mrs. Harrison moaned. "She l-loves you. And I l-love you too. The nerve of the thing, s-sending me all that old trash! And s-sending you p-p-presents like that! Well, you can just choose between us, that's all. If you want me to stay, you can just send every bit of it back!"

Mr. Harrison was trying desperately not to think of the expression on Mr. Quandt's face — and of his probable fate if the police got wind of his little affair with Bessie. However, he got a grip on himself. He pointed out that Bessie was just a machine. He explained that she didn't really *love* him, not even as much as a Cuddlypet would have. It was merely a matter of circuits, of condensers and things. He also explained that, much as he wanted to get rid of the stuff that was cluttering the place, it would be taking too big a risk. Of course, he could drop all that lettuce down the garbage disposer, and he guessed he could sneak out some night and let the rabbits loose in the park. But they'd just have to live with the rest of the stuff for a year or two, maybe selling it off or giving it away bit by bit. If they did that, and didn't let anyone in the apartment, and didn't have any friends in, maybe they'd be safe enough. Mr. Quandt couldn't have talked to the police; if he had, they would've been there by now. And tomorrow he himself would go down to Moss-Eagleberg's, and he'd take the Schroeder Bypass right out, and erase all the records, and they'd have no more trouble — because Bessie was just a machine after all.

While Mr. Harrison was explaining all this, he had to take time out fairly frequently to declare that he did *too* love his Chickadee; to protest that he'd done it for her, and *not* just because he didn't like cats; to point out that after all she *did* have four iridium-mink coats.

Finally, a relative calm was restored. They kissed and made up. Together, they spent several hours in pushing and hauling. They stuffed all the closets. The duck blind went under a piano with the rabbits. The small Japanese automobile was parked in the bathroom. When, exhausted, they crept into bed, a navigable channel had been dredged through the hall, and part of the living room carpet was actually visible.

"Oh, I do hope things'll work out," Mrs. Harrison sighed, as she turned out the light. "I'm still sort of scared. I can't believe that your Bessie is just a mechanical brain. I — I think she's *alive*."

Mr. Harrison slept rather poorly. First he dreamed that he was working on Bessie, installing Schroeder Bypasses and Dappleby Blocks. The Dappleby Blocks kept blowing up like balloons and exploding, and every time one would blow up, Bessie would purr and purr, and he'd reach for a wire

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and find whiskers instead, or a handful of fur. And then Winkler and Swartz would come in, and they'd dance around him carrying umbrellas over their heads. And Mr. Olson was there, singing Cuddlypets commercials in his concrete-mixer voice. And finally the fur and the whiskers came up all around Mr. Harrison, like tall grass, and Mr. Quandt opened up a big door and out came these critters wearing athletic supporters. And Mr. Olson was one of them, somehow, and he was singing:

"Cudd-lee-pets, Cudd-lee-pets,
Snuggle up to Cudd-lee-pets!
Sweet as sugar, big as busses —
CUDDLYHIPPOPOTAMUSES!"

Mr. Harrison woke up, in an icy sweat. He took two sleeping tablets. Fifteen minutes later, he found himself in a police station, under a big, bright light which had something to do with the new psychiatric technique. Dr. Schroeder and Dr. Dappleby were dressed up as policemen, and they were holding him down while Mr. Olson read aloud from a list of the things Bessie had sent him, and every time he read one out Mr. Kerfoid erased a word from his B.S. diploma in Cyber-Surgery, until there weren't any left and the diploma was blank. Then a steam whistle went off in his head, and his mind went all whirly, and the next thing he knew he was out on the street, on all fours, and he felt *different* somehow. He looked around at himself and saw that he was covered with iridium-mink fur. There was a collar around his neck, and a leash, and Dr. Schroeder was leading him — hop, skip, jump, hop, skip, jump. And he felt so grateful to Dr. Schroeder for feeding him all that wonderful, juicy, raw Syntho-horse that he rubbed up against him and purred. And then it wasn't Dr. Schroeder any more, but a little Japanese auto pulling him into Bessie's control room, which was a mouth full of teeth, and behind every tooth was a policeman, and they were all purring, purring, purr —

Mr. Harrison was not in good shape when he rose. He gulped down his coffee, pretended to shave, and went off to Jonson, Williamson, Selznick, and Jones. He found Mr. Jonson, who looked at him queerly and made some remark about "godawful benders."

"Mr. Jonson," he asked, as casually as he could, "did you ever hear of Charge Reference records getting into the permanent memory bank of one of those big department store brains? I mean so there'd be no control over what the machine did?"

"That just couldn't happen," Mr. Jonson assured him. "It's impossible. Only living creatures can function that way."

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Mr. Harrison sighed.

He forced himself to wait until noon. Then he hurried down to Moss-Eagleberg's. Sure enough, there was only one subprofessional on duty in the control room, a wide, red-faced, cheerful sort of a fellow.

"I'm from Jonson, Williamson, Selznick, and Jones," Mr. Harrison said. "Did a job on this brain a while back. How's she getting along?"

"Say, you must be Mr. Harrison!" The man grinned, got to his feet, held out his hand. "Filmore's the name. I heard all about you. Winkler told me all about how you brought Bessie back from the dead. Well, she's just fine — she's just *purring* along."

Mr. Harrison bit his lip. "That's good. But maybe I'd better give her a checkup anyhow. There'll be no extra charge. It's part of our regular service."

"That's mighty white of you, Mr. Harrison. Bessie'll appreciate that."

Mr. Harrison counted to ten. He managed a smile. "Oh, by the way," he said, opening his kit. "I seem to have forgotten my replacement transistors. They're in a box on the seat of my car. It's parked on the third-level lot. If I give you the key could you —?"

"Get 'em for you? Say, I'll be glad to, Mr. Harrison."

As soon as the man had departed, he closed the door, locked it, went down the stairs as fast as he could, and tore out the Schroeder Bypass and all its connections. Then he came up again, plugged in the mike, asked for the file on Mr. and Mrs. E. Howard Harrison. As soon as the numbers showed up on the typer, he flipped the switch from RECORD over to TOTAL ERASURE. The machine clicked and whirred. A little red light blinked three times. All the Harrison data had been removed, deleted, expunged.

"Boy, *that* does it!" Mr. Harrison murmured in triumph. Joy and relief surged in his heart. He burst into song:

"Pussycats are full of germs,
Dogs have nasty fleas and worms,
That's not what *I* want to get —
Mom, I want a CUDD-LEE-PET!"

And, on the final note, he unplugged the typer, flipped the switches back where they belonged, and pulled out the mike. When the subprofessional came back with the spare transistors, he was packing his kit.

Mr. Harrison went away whistling. He stopped at a phone on the way to the shop, and called up his wife, and told her that their troubles were over. All that afternoon, he worked like a beaver.

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He came home at his regular time. He rang the bell. Nobody answered. He knocked. When he thought he heard someone stirring inside, he called, "Chickadee, are you home?" several times. Finally, he took out his key and tried to open the door. Something seemed to be blocking it, something too heavy to shove.

He frowned. He began to feel frightened. After hesitating a minute or two, he went downstairs to the apartment under his own, and persuaded the inquisitive elderly lady who lived there to let him through to the fire escape, promising to let her know *right away* if he found anything wrong.

Luckily, the kitchen window hadn't been latched. He crawled in. A glance was enough to inform him that something quite dreadful had happened. One end of the kitchen was filled with identical packages. They were stacked round the freezer, and they reached almost up to the ceiling. And that wasn't all. On the table, weighted down, was a note.

Slowly, with a horrible feeling of doom, Mr. Harrison read it.

> Dear Eberhard,
>
> I have been a good wife to you the best I know how even if you aren't a real professional any more like Elmer Maginnis. If it was another woman I could forgive you I guess — but this is *too much*. I have gone home to Mother. I have taken only what really is mine, like my mink coats. You won't be lonely, because your Bessie has *everything*. If you don't believe me, just look in the living room.
>
> Your wife, Mignonetta (Chickadee)

Like an automaton, Mr. Harrison went into the hall. He found it filled with huge square objects, and he clambered up over them. At the living room door he paused, struggling feebly against the compulsion to open it. He watched his hand reach for the knob, turn it, push the door ajar. He went in.

There they were, as he had known they would be when he walked through the Syntho-horse packages in the kitchen and over the king-sized catboxes in the hall. They were everywhere — on and under the pianos, on the chairs, on the mantelpiece. They were sitting there happily, small, medium, and large, striped and mottled and spotted.

The Cuddlypets saw Mr. Harrison. All together, they rose. They all started purring. They came padding towards him —

There was love in their eyes.

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Fredric Brown has a large number of claims to fame: As a detective story writer, he has published twelve unusually successful novels, won the annual Mystery Writers of America's Edgar award with the first of them, and is now MWA's Regional Vice-President for Southern California. As a science fiction writer, he created one of s.f.'s most memorable characters in the immortal Mitkey, the Star Mouse, and wrote one of the most enjoyable of hardcover novels, that strange fusion of outrageous parody and chilling melodrama, WHAT MAD UNIVERSE. *As a by-line in any field, he offers a first name which printers obstinately refuse to set correctly. (We have our fingers crossed this time.) Rather unjustly, he is least known as a writer of "pure" fantasy — a field in which (remember the terrifying* Come and Go Mad?) *he excels as easily as in the others. No murders in this F&SF debut of Brown's, no mad universes — just a quietly true perception of the reactions of everyday people to a challenge not of this world.*

Rustle of Wings

by FREDRIC BROWN

POKER WASN'T EXACTLY a religion with Gramp, but it was about the nearest thing he had to a religion for the first 50 or so years of his life. That's about how old he was when I went to live with him and Gram. That was a long time ago, in a little Ohio town. I can date it pretty well, because it was just after President McKinley was assassinated. I don't mean there was any connection between McKinley's assassination and my going to live with Gram and Gramp; it just happened about the same time. I was about ten.

Gram was a good woman and a Methodist and never touched a card, except occasionally to put away a deck that Gramp had left lying somewhere, and then she'd handle it gingerly, almost as though it might explode. But she'd given up, years before, trying to reform Gramp out of his heathen ways; given up trying *seriously*, I mean. She hadn't given up nagging him about it.

If she had, Gramp would have missed the nagging, I guess; he was so used to it by then. I was too young, then, to realize what an odd couple they made — the village atheist and the president of the Methodist missionary

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society. To me, then, they were just Gramp and Gram, and there wasn't anything strange about their loving and living together despite their differences.

Maybe it wasn't so strange after all. I mean, Gramp was a good man underneath the crust of his cynicism. He was one of the kindest men I ever knew, and one of the most generous. He got cantankerous only when it came to superstition or religion — he refused ever to distinguish between the two — and when it came to playing poker with his cronies, or, for that matter, when it came to playing poker with anyone, anywhere, any time

He was a good player, too; he won a little more often than he lost. He used to figure that about a tenth of his income came from playing poker; the other nine-tenths came from the truck farm he ran, just at the edge of town. In a manner of speaking, though, you might say he came out even, because Gram insisted on tithing — giving one tenth of their income to the Methodist church and missions.

Maybe that fact helped Gram's conscience in the matter of living with Gramp; anyway, I remember that she was always madder when he lost than when he won. How she got around his being an atheist I don't know. Probably she never really believed him, even at his most dogmatic negative.

I'd been with them about three years; I must have been about thirteen at the time of the big change. That was still a long time ago, but I'll never forget the night the change started, the night I heard the rustle of leathery wings in the dining room. It was the night that the seed salesman ate with us, and later played poker with Gramp.

His name — I won't forget it — was Charley Bryce. He was a little man; I remember that he was just as tall as I was at the time, which wouldn't have been more than an inch or two over five feet. He wouldn't have weighed much over 100 pounds and he had short-cropped black hair that started rather low on his forehead but tapered off to a bald spot the size of a silver dollar farther back. I remember the bald spot well; I stood back of him for a while during the poker and recall thinking what a perfect fit that spot would be for one of the silver dollars — cartwheels, they were called — before him on the table. I don't remember his face at all

I don't recall the conversation during dinner. In all probability it was largely about seeds, because the salesman hadn't yet completed taking Gramp's order. He'd called late in the afternoon; Gramp had been in town at the broker's with a load of truck, but Gram had expected him back any minute and had told the salesman to wait. But by the time Gramp and the wagon came back it was so late that Gram had asked the salesman to stay and eat with us, and he had accepted.

Gramp and Charley Bryce still sat at the table, I recall, while I helped

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Gram clear off the dishes, and Bryce had the order blank before him, finishing writing up Gramp's order.

It was after I'd carried the last load and came back to take care of the napkins that poker was mentioned for the first time; I don't know which of the men mentioned it first. But Gramp was telling animatedly of a hand he'd held the last time he'd played, a few nights before. The stranger — possibly I forgot to say that Charley Bryce *was* a stranger; we'd never met him before and he must have been shifted to a different territory because we never saw him again — was listening with smiling interest. No, I don't remember his face at all, but I remember that he smiled a lot.

I picked up the napkins and rings so Gram could take up the tablecloth from under them. And while she was folding the cloth I put three napkins — hers and Gramp's and mine — back into our respective napkin rings and put the salesman's napkin with the laundry. Gram had that expression on her face again, the tight-lipped disapproving look she wore whenever cards were being played or discussed.

And then Gramp asked, "Where are the cards, Ma?"

Gram sniffed. "Wherever you put them, William," she told him. So Gramp got the cards from the drawer in the sideboard where they were always kept, and got a big handful of silver out of his pocket and he and the stranger, Charley Bryce, started to play two-handed stud poker across a corner of the big square dining room table.

I was out in the kitchen then, for a while, helping Gram with the dishes, and when I came back most of the silver was in front of Bryce, and Gramp had gone into his wallet and there was a pile of dollar bills in front of him instead of the cartwheels. Dollar bills were big in those days, not the little skimpy ones we have now.

I stood there watching the game after I'd finished the dishes. I don't remember any of the hands they held; I remember that money seesawed back and forth, though, without anybody getting more than ten or twenty dollars ahead or behind. And I remember the stranger looking at the clock after a while and saying he wanted to catch the 10 o'clock train and would it be all right to deal off at half-past 9, and Gramp saying sure.

So they did, and at 9:30 it was Charley Bryce who was ahead. He counted off the money he himself had put into the game and there was a pile of silver cartwheels left, and he counted that, and I remember that he grinned. He said, "Thirteen dollars exactly. Thirteen pieces of silver."

"The devil," said Gramp; it was one of his favorite expressions.

And Gram sniffed. "Speak of the devil," she said, "and you hear the rustle of his wings."

Charley Bryce laughed softly. He'd picked up the deck of cards again,

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and he riffled them softly, as softly as he had laughed, and asked, "Like this?"

That was when I started to get scared.

Gram just sniffed again, though. She said, "Yes, like that. And if you gentlemen will excuse me — And you, Johnny, you better not stay up much longer."

She went upstairs.

The salesman chuckled and riffled the cards again. Louder, this time. I don't know whether it was the rustling sound they made or the thirteen pieces of silver, exactly, or what, but I was scared. I wasn't standing behind the salesman any more; I'd walked around the table. He saw my face and grinned at me. He said, "Son, you look like you believe in the devil, and think I'm him. Do you?"

I said "No, sir," but I must not have said it very convincingly. Gramp laughed out loud, and he wasn't a man that laughed out loud very often.

Gramp said, "I'm surprised at you, Johnny. Darned if you don't sound like you *do* believe it!" And he was off laughing again.

Charley Bryce looked at Gramp. There was a twinkle in his eye. He asked, "Don't you believe it?"

Gramp quit laughing. He said, "Cut it out, Charley. Giving the boy silly ideas." He looked around to be sure Gram had left. "I don't want him to grow up superstitious."

"Everybody's superstitious, more or less," Charley Bryce said.

Gramp shook his head. "Not me."

Bryce said, "You don't think you are, but if it came to a showdown, I'd bet you are."

Gramp frowned. "You'd bet what, and how?"

The salesman riffled the deck of cards once more and then put them down. He picked up the stack of cartwheels and counted them again. He said, "I'll bet thirteen dollars to your one dollar. Thirteen pieces of silver says you'd be afraid to prove you don't believe in the devil."

Gramp had put away his folding money but he took his wallet out again and took a dollar bill out of it. He put the bill on the table between them. He said, "Charley Bryce, you're covered."

Charley Bryce put the pile of silver dollars beside it, and took a fountain pen out of his pocket, the one Gramp had signed the seed order with. I remember the pen because it was one of the first fountain pens I'd ever seen and I'd been interested in it.

Charley Bryce handed Gramp the fountain pen and took a clean seed order blank out of his pocket and put it on the table in front of Gramp, the unprinted side up.

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He said, "You write 'For thirteen dollars I sell my soul,' and then sign it."

Gramp laughed and picked up the fountain pen. He started to write, fast, and then his hand moved slower and slower and he stopped; I couldn't see how far he'd written.

He looked across the table at Charley Bryce. He said, "What if—?" Then he looked down at the paper a while more and then at the money in the middle of the table; the fourteen dollars, one paper and thirteen silver.

Then he grinned, but it was a kind of sick grin.

He said, "Take the bet, Charley. You win, I guess."

That was all there was to it. The salesman chuckled and picked up the money, and Gramp walked with him to the railroad station.

But Gramp wasn't ever exactly the same after that. Oh, he kept on playing poker; he never did change about that. Not even after he started going to church with Gram every Sunday regularly, and even after he finally let them make him a vestryman he kept on playing cards, and Gram kept on nagging him about it. He taught me how to play, too, in spite of Gram.

We never saw Charley Bryce again; he must have been transferred to a different route or changed jobs. And it wasn't until the day of Gramp's funeral in 1913 that I learned that Gram had heard the conversation and the bet that night; she'd been straightening things in the linen closet in the hall and hadn't gone upstairs yet. She told me on the way home from the funeral, ten years later.

I asked her, I remember, whether she would have come in and stopped Gramp if he'd been going to sign, and she smiled. She said, "He wouldn't have, Johnny. And it wouldn't have mattered if he had. If there really is a devil, God wouldn't let him wander around tempting people like that, in disguise."

"Would you have signed, Gram?" I asked her.

"Thirteen dollars for writing something silly on a piece of paper, Johnny? Of course I would. Wouldn't you?"

I said, "I don't know." And it's been a long time since then, but I still don't.

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The speculative mind of J. J. Coupling ranges through all fields, from perfectly serious scientific research in electronics through such borderline topics as the composition of music through mathematically controlled chance on to the sheer science-fantasy of time travel. In this last realm, Mr. Coupling has discovered a significant and unarguable implication of the Heisenberg Principle — and incorporated it into a subtle, ironic and thoroughly fascinating story.

Mr. Kinkaid's Pasts

by J. J. COUPLING

I AM SURE that the Company's records are quite adequate and represent the best insurance practice. It is a fine company, and on April 14 I shall have represented it for 43 years. But I try to feel a personal sort of responsibility for my clients, and I keep a card file in my room to remind me of their interests. This I go through at least once a week; but more often, when I have no other plans, I run through it almost every evening, assessing eventualities and trying to remember my clients as the human beings that they are.

That evening I noticed that I should finally take action concerning the card with the violet tab and the red-and-green marker with the number 27. All cards have a tab; violet is for term insurance. The marker, however, is for premiums in arrears. The colors and the number told me that in just two weeks from that day the policy would lapse. I allow myself that much time to add my personal efforts to the company routines in serving the interests of my clients.

The card bore no photograph opposite the name F. X. Nordstrom (sometimes I manage to obtain snapshots of my clients), but I remembered the man well. He was a tall, vigorous, blond, bearded man. He had taken out $20,000 of term insurance for two years. The first annual premium had been paid; but the second had not, and later communications had been returned undelivered. I remembered further that Mr. Nordstrom had been very uncommunicative. He had spoken only in answer to direct questions, and then only if absolutely necessary. I had surmised, however, that he had taken the insurance in connection with some business venture. This was

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rather confirmed by the fact that the first address he gave, c/o S. F. Kinkaid, 710 Starr St., was that of the beneficiary of the policy. This address had been changed by post card (I remembered) to Shephard's Hotel, Cairo, and that later by airmail (I saved the cover for Samuel T. Henry, whose son, Jeremy S., collects stamps and likes the Near East particularly) to Poste Restante, Luxor. The Company or I had had no occasion to communicate with Mr. Nordstrom there until the second annual premium was due, and as I have noted, the letter was returned undelivered.

As Starr Street is within a few miles of my room, I resolved to call on Mr. Kinkaid after dinner the next day to see if I could ascertain Mr. Nordstrom's whereabouts and be of service to him.

The Green Gables bus took me to Askelon Avenue and Brent Place. From there I had only to walk back one street to Starr, and three blocks and a quarter north brought me to 710.

I found 710 Starr Street to be one of those outmoded houses of the so-called Spanish type: tanned stucco with a red tiled roof. There was a patio to the left front and a large leaded window to the right, with insets of colored glass. The whole place, as nearly as I could tell in the evening, seemed well kept, and the lawn was still damp from the sprinklers, which were then turned off. I reached the front door through a gate in the patio, and the button rang a double chiming bell which brought Mr. Kinkaid himself to the door.

When I had given Mr. Kinkaid my card and explained that I thought he might be of help in locating a client of mine, he kindly asked me into the living room. This, I saw, was fitted as an office with files and large metal storage cabinets along the walls. At the south wall Mr. Kinkaid had an oak desk, clear except for a telephone, a calendar, and a photograph of a handsome young lady. Now his chair was swiveled away from the desk, so that he faced me across a long oak table, on the other side of which I was seated in an oak office armchair. As I talked with him I noted his features, which I still remember well.

Mr. Kinkaid was about five feet six or seven, and he weighed perhaps 160 pounds. He had a roundish face with a snub nose and blue eyes. His sandy hair, which had thinned considerably (he was perhaps 45) was combed across the top of his head, and his eyebrows were sparse and inconspicuous. Perhaps his most notable feature was that his neck was short, so that his head seemed set squarely upon his shoulders, and as these shoulders were hunched forward, he appeared rather to look up at me.

Unlike Mr. Nordstrom, Mr. Kinkaid was very agreeable and open to talk to. I found that Mr. Nordstrom had indeed taken the insurance out for business purposes. Mr. Kinkaid had advanced him the sum of the insurance

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for a venture to be conducted in Egypt, and the insurance had been a precaution against misadventure on the part of Mr. Nordstrom. Our letters to Egypt had not reached Mr. Nordstrom because he had since returned. Perhaps he had failed to notify us, or perhaps his letter had gone astray. Since that time, Mr. Nordstrom had, unfortunately, disappeared.

Mr. Kinkaid made every effort to be helpful to me, and there ensued a conversation which lasted far into the night. Although I remember the whole thing almost word for word as it occurred, it was of course full of false starts, repetitions, and inconsequential details. Here I can only hope to reduce its content to some sort of coherent account.

I may say that throughout Mr. Kinkaid showed himself to be a man of wide interests and sound knowledge. In talking with my clients I pick up a smattering of information concerning the variety of fields which I find they like to discuss, but with Mr. Kinkaid I found myself continually out of my depth, so that I cannot be sure that I have rightly understood him.

From the very start I found myself plunged into a subject of which I have only a superficial knowledge. The venture in which Mr. Nordstrom was engaged had been nothing less than an archeological expedition of limited scope. Mr. Kinkaid, who had, as I could see, a deep interest in the Old Testament, was particularly concerned with the role of the Jews in Egyptian history. He had met Mr. Nordstrom, who was a professional explorer and adventurer, through a mutual friend. This friend was, I might add, the handsome young lady whose photograph stood on Mr. Kinkaid's desk. The idea had come to Mr. Kinkaid of financing a modest expedition to Egypt to search for possible traces of Joseph and his people, by means of first-hand examination of various archeological relics and monuments and, if necessary, through actual excavation. I have a suspicion, perhaps unjust, that this last was to have been a clandestine affair, for in our very long conversation no slightest mention was made of obtaining the permission of the Egyptian government.

Mr. Nordstrom was to have been gone two years, but he returned after a year only, with a story of some trouble with the authorities. He brought back, however, two relics, which he presumably smuggled from the country. One was a fragmentary mummified skull, and the other was a torn fragment of a papyrus manuscript. These Mr. Nordstrom had obtained from a looted and sand-filled tomb. After consulting his file, Mr. Kinkaid located a numbered black box in one of the steel cabinets and, bringing it to the table, exhibited these relics to me.

The skull lacked the lower jaw, and some of the teeth in the upper jaw were missing. One of those remaining seemed to be filled; Mr. Kinkaid said it was a tin filling, which was common among the ancient Egyptians.

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Of the papyrus fragment I could make nothing, but Mr. Kinkaid told me with some show of excitement that the hieroglyphs said nothing less than: *The Book of Joseph, and the account of his stewardship to Potiphar.*

My good parents saw that I received sound religious training, and you can imagine my emotion to think that here lay a contemporary account of Joseph, and that the skull was perhaps that of one who had known him.

Mr. Kinkaid had even greater surprises in store for me, however. Much as he regretted Mr. Nordstrom's precipitate return with no more than these tantalizing fragments, he was delighted at the same time to have obtained so much, and he resolved to have more. This brought him to a subject even more foreign to my understanding than Egyptology. I am not sure that I have even properly identified the field upon which Mr. Kinkaid now touched, but I take it to be a part of the higher mathematics or of quantum physics. I found everything about it bewildering and, indeed, almost miraculous, but who today can gainsay the marvels of science, when cybernetics gives us machines that play games and think far beyond the power of man, when astrophysics reveals the continuing creation of the universe, and when even Dr. Einstein confesses himself baffled by the wonders of wave mechanics?

Mr. Kinkaid's achievement almost outdid these marvels, however. It was nothing less than reaching the time of Joseph and the Pharaohs in one's very person! The principles involved I could not fully grasp, but I gathered that the essential element was mathematical and mental, involving a reorientation of the mind in hyperspace. In this, I learned, the papyrus fragment played an important part, for it served as a sort of compass in directing the minds of Mr. Nordstrom and Mr. Kinkaid to the times of Joseph, just as Mr. Kinkaid's calling to mind the first name of Mr. Nordstrom was essential in directing the latter's return into the present.

This made me think of the magic use of names in primitive societies, as explained to me by Peter J. Mertz, one of my clients who is interested in anthropology. I marveled that as Democritus understood something of atoms in times preceding the rise of modern science, so too, apparently, even primitive peoples have by chance forseen the results of an even more astonishing penetration of the hidden order of nature.

Mr. Kinkaid assured me that had two not been necessary for such a temporal excursion, he himself would have endeavored to reach the time of Joseph, but he doubted that he could trust anyone less expert than himself to guide him back through the proper use of his given name.

That Mr. Kinkaid himself possessed this facility was shown by the successful return of Mr. Nordstrom from his first journey to the time of Joseph in a venture that was not entirely successful.

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It seems that Mr. Kinkaid was troubled almost as much as I had been by the stalwart Mr. Nordstrom's taciturnity, and it was only with difficulty that he pried from him the barest bones of the story.

How Mr. Nordstrom came to just the part of Joseph's career he reached perhaps he alone could tell us. As he and Mr. Kinkaid concentrated on the papyrus and on Joseph, there was a snap, and Mr. Nordstrom found himself in the midst of a tremendous hullabaloo. He was in a large and richly furnished oriental apartment. Two huge, fat, beardless blacks were holding a handsome, curly-headed young man by either arm. A pretty but somewhat plump woman, her clothes disarrayed, was screaming and pointing. Girls, very scantily clad, were rushing about aimlessly, except for one, who supported the woman and tried to hold a phial under her nose.

Mr. Nordstrom, who had found himself stark naked in the corner of the room, hid behind a drapery and watched these and ensuing events. What immediately followed was that a portly man of middle age strutted onto the scene of disorder. There was a conversation, unintelligible to Nordstrom, and the blacks dragged the handsome and apparently protesting youth away. The portly man left. The girls clustered about the woman, who first collapsed on a couch and then sprang up and shouted angrily, apparently dismissing them. Then she collapsed, sighing and weeping and tossing about in great restlessness.

It was at this point that Nordstrom took action. Just how he secured her cooperation I am not sure. He was, I had noted, a man with an air of authority, but even so, it must have been hard to explain himself and his condition to a hysterical woman who could not understand a word he said.

Whatever the means of which he availed himself, he managed not only to insinuate himself into the good graces of the woman, who turned out to be none other than Potiphar's wife, but he secured her cooperation to the extent that she clothed him, gave him quarters in her apartment for several months, and, during this period, undertook to teach him the Egyptian language. This, of course, was an absolute requisite if he were to progress further in his mission.

I gather that something went wrong in the meeting of Nordstrom and Potiphar, for a point came at which he found himself secured by the two black giants at Potiphar's command, and he judged it wise to make his escape by returning to the present with the aid of Mr. Kinkaid.

When he had with great labor extracted this general account from Mr. Nordstrom, Mr. Kinkaid was halfway between joy and disappointment. His plan had so nearly succeeded, but Mr. Nordstrom had seen Joseph (if, indeed, the handsome youth had been Joseph) for a few moments only. Still, he had learned the Egyptian language — or so they both thought.

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For Mr. Nordstrom's next venture into the time of Joseph disclosed a phenomenon which from the point of view of scientific interest I find perhaps the most fascinating in Mr. Kinkaid's account.

Both Mr. Kinkaid and Mr. Nordstrom had agreed that it would be best to return to the same period, where, or rather, when, Mr. Nordstrom could endeavor to handle his relations with Potiphar more successfully. Accordingly, Mr. Nordstrom found himself naked in the same scene he had encountered before. But it was different! The youth held by the black men was a mean-looking fellow this time, and one of the black men was slightly lame. The apartment was different also, and Potiphar's wife was taller, not so plump, and not nearly so good-looking. Most startling of all to Mr. Nordstrom was the fact that although he had spent months in this period perfecting his knowledge of Egyptian, he could barely catch the drift of what was being said. The vowels were different, and the accents were placed differently. This latter especially made the speech hard to follow.

I must confess that I was no less puzzled than Mr. Nordstrom had been, and I interrupted Mr. Kinkaid's account at this point to ask for an explanation.

If anything could astound me in this age of miracles of science, Mr. Kinkaid's explanation would have, but I have learned that there are deeper minds than mine, and I accept what I am assured is true and try to make myself understand it.

Suffice it to say, there is no unique past! The uncertainty principle of Heisenberg, which philosophers use to assure us that the world is not a predestined machine, without room for free will, leading to one unique future, just as decisively contradicts the idea of a unique past. No present measurement made on the ultimate particles of matter can predict just where they will go, nor can any such measurement tell exactly whence they have come. Photographs, pictures, manuscripts, monuments, and shards of civilizations sketch in rough outlines of the past, but science is helpless to fill in the picture precisely. Thus, there is an infinity of pasts which are consistent with all the evidences in our present universe, and any of these pasts is as much the real past as any other. Mr. Nordstrom had visited one possible past on the first occasion and a different past on the second!

Once this had been explained to me, such knowledge of Egyptology as I once obtained from F. O. Axerson of the city museum, a client of mine, came to my rescue. Of course the spoken language could be different in different pasts, for the Egyptians had signs for neither vowels nor accents. Only the consonants would have to be consistent from past to past!

Mr. Kinkaid himself congratulated me on this observation. I in turn sympathized with him on the unfortunate turn his experiments had taken,

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for they clearly made it impossible for him ever to ascertain the exact truth about Joseph and the Jews in Egypt. If all versions of the past which do not contradict the present are one as much the true past as another, certainly history can never become the exact science which Mr. Kinkaid had been striving to make it. Indeed, it may even be that such questions as whether Moses is a historical figure or a mythological folk hero have become meaningless.

I observed to Mr. Kinkaid, however, that, looked at broadly, this new fact of science should tend to promote tolerance and respect for the opinions of others, religious or secular, for divergent views on history, sacred or profane, need no longer be regarded as contradictory.

Disappointed as he had been by his effort to get at the unique facts about Joseph, Mr. Kinkaid nevertheless agreed with me in this cheerful view of his discovery, and the conversation passed on to Mr. Nordstrom's further experiences.

It appeared that the taciturn explorer was no better able to establish friendly relations with Potiphar on his second attempt than on the first, for again he was forced to return hurriedly to our era with no further knowledge about Joseph in any past.

The third attempt was, alas, even less successful, for Mr. Nordstrom had failed to return at all!

Mr. Kinkaid reproached himself concerning this. He believed that in his preoccupation he may not have concentrated on Mr. Nordstrom and on his given name frequently enough.

"You see," Mr. Kinkaid told me, "I was very worried about Wanda at the time."

He indicated that Wanda was the young lady in the photograph on his desk, and he looked so morose that delicacy forbade me to inquire concerning her and his troubles.

With whatever justification, Mr. Kinkaid blamed himself severely for not having kept Mr. Nordstrom and his name more in mind.

"Perhaps," he said, "he had need to return to me to escape some terrible danger, and there was no mind nor token ready to guide him here. Indeed, I fear I have evidence that this was so."

At this, Mr. Kinkaid looked even sadder, and I could not forbear encouraging him to tell me more.

"Mr. Nordstrom," he said, "had traveled to many places, including Ethiopia, before I came to know him. He once told me that a native dentist in that place had filled one of his teeth with tin. This primitive dentistry I associated at the time with the Egyptian practice.

"I fear," Mr. Kinkaid continued, pointing to the skull, "that my col-

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league finally met with violence at the hands of Potiphar, and that we have his skull here."

Mr. Kinkaid then suggested that while Mr. Nordstrom was almost certainly dead, it would be very hard to establish his decease. Further, as Mr. Nordstrom had returned with some success from two expeditions, the reason for his holding insurance on Mr. Nordstrom's life had ceased to be. We agreed together that it would be wisest merely to let the policy lapse.

By the time we had reached this point it was very late indeed, and I took my leave at 2:26 A.M., asking that I might return some day to pay a friendly visit. To this Mr. Kinkaid readily assented.

Unfortunately, I was never able to do so. Within the week I had further news of Mr. Kinkaid in the *Daily Gazette*. Neighbors had been induced by the evidence of accumulating milk bottles and papers to notify the police, and it was found that Mr. Kinkaid had disappeared. He left behind him all his personal belongings and household goods in their orderly places. Oddly enough, the cabinets in his office were found empty, and the only contents of that room, except for the furniture, were a skull and a scrap of Egyptian papyrus on his desk, a heap of clothes on the floor, and a brief note, which said simply:

My name is Samuel. Think of me.

Of this note the police could of course make nothing, although it was clear enough to me. Mr. Kinkaid, hopeless and full of remorse, had decided to venture among the pasts in search of Mr. Nordstrom, and he relied upon me to help him back. My feeling concerning Mr. Kinkaid's state of mind was confirmed when the police discovered that the "Wanda" of the photograph on Mr. Kinkaid's desk (Wanda Mainwaring, a stenographer) had died shortly before from an acute attack diagnosed as gastroenteritis. Mr. Kinkaid must have been very close to her, for he had kindly provided for her cremation and inurnment.

Although I could see that the authorities were completely at sea in dealing with the situation (almost as much so, indeed, as the yellow press with its painful hints of a "jealousy slaying" and deliberate disappearance), a certain natural caution kept me from approaching them. This was reinforced by the fact that my own understanding of some aspects of the situation was incomplete. I had every reason to believe that Mr. Kinkaid was very well off, and yet the police found no trace of money or securities, and Mr. Kinkaid's bank accounts had been recently exhausted. I can only presume that he made some wise disposition of his assets before taking the dangerous step he took.

Needless to say, I have frequently thought rather hopelessly of Mr.

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Kinkaid, using his name Samuel in my meditations. Sometimes I take the card with the violet tab and the red-and-green marker with the number 27 from the dead file where it now reposes and hold it in my hand the while, in my effort to direct Mr. Kinkaid back to the present. I find it hard to concentrate, however, for my mind continually wanders over the adventures of Mr. Nordstrom in Potiphar's house, and from there to speculations on how astounding may be the possible and valid realities of the events described in the Old Testament.

Truth to tell, from the first I have despaired of my ability to help Mr. Kinkaid back to the present, if indeed he is trying to return. My mind is not only untutored in this new field; I feel that it lacks the power of concentration necessary for accomplishment in science. Mr. Kinkaid was unwise in placing so much reliance in me. While I am sorry for him, I do not reproach myself, for I feel that his poor judgment, due, no doubt, to his emotional state, rather than my inadequacy, is at fault.

Although the same natural caution which kept me from approaching the police at the time of these occurrences has prevented my relating them to anyone subsequently, I have felt it only just to leave a record of such interesting events for such as may care to read it when neither I nor the Company can be embarrassed by my connection with something which was so sensationally misinterpreted in the press of another day.

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There was a girl once, a blue-eyed, long-legged girl, who was as selfish-spiteful as she was shapely and she wasn't used to being ignored — especially by poor singers of mountainy ballads. So, to ease her pride, she cast a witch-spell by the side of the Bottomless Pool to win herself the love of our modest friend John. But she got more than she bargained for — as often happens to them that fool with magicking — and even John's guitar was silent before that which came dripping out of the pool.

One Other

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Up on Hark Mountain I climbed all alone, by a trail like a ladder. Under my old brogans was sometimes mud, sometimes rock, sometimes rolling gravel. I laid hold on laurel and oak scrub and sourwood and dogwood to help me up the steepest places. Sweat soaked the back of my hickory shirt and under the band of my old hat. Even my silver-strung guitar, bouncing behind me, felt weighty as an anvil. Hark Mountain's not the highest in the South, but it's one of the steepiest.

I reckoned I was close to the top, for I heard a murmuring voice up there, a young-sounding woman's voice. All at once she like to yelled out a name, and it was my name.

"John!" she said, and murmured again, and then, "John. . . ."

Gentlemen, you can wager I sailed up the last stretch, on hands and knees, to the very top.

On top of Hark Mountain's tipmost top was a pool.

Hush, gentlemen, without a stream or a draw or a branch to feed it, where no pool could by nature be expected, was a clear blue pool, bright but not exactly sweet-looking. That highest point of Hark Mountain wasn't bigger, much, than a well-sized farmyard, and it had room for hardly the pool and its rim of tight rocks. And the trees that grew between those tight rocks at its rim looked leafless and gnarled, but alive. Their branch-twigs crooked like claw nails.

Almost in reach of me, by the pool's edge, burned a fire, and tending it knelt a girl.

She was tall, but not strong-built like a country girl. She was slim-built,

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like a town girl, and she wore town clothes — a white blouse-shirt, and blue jeans fold-rolled high up on her long legs, and soft slipper-shoes on her feet. Her arms and legs and neck were brown as nutmeat, the way fashiony girls seek to be brown. She put a tweak of stuff in the fire, and I saw her long, sharp, red fingernails. My name rose in her speech as she sang, almost:

". . . it is the bones of JOHN that I trouble. I for JOHN burn this laurel."

She put in some laurel leaves. "Even as it crackles and burns, even thus may the flesh of JOHN burn for me."

In went something else. "Even as I melt this wax, with ONE OTHER to aid, so speedily may JOHN for love of me be melted."

From a little clay pot she dripped something. *Drip*, the fire danced. *Drip*, it danced again, jumping up. *Drip*, a third jumpup dance.

"Thrice I pour libation. Thrice, by ONE OTHER, I say the spell. Be it with a friend he tarries, a woman he lingers, may JOHN utterly forget them."

Standing up, she held out something red and wavy that I knew.

"This from JOHN I took, and now I cast it into —"

But quietly I was beside her, and snatched the red scarf away.

"I've been wondering where I lost that," I said, and she turned and faced me.

Slightly I knew her from somewhere. She was yellow-haired, blue-eyed, brown-faced. She had a little bitty nose and a red mouth. Her blue eyes widened almost as wide as the blue pool itself, and she smiled, with big, even white teeth.

"John," she sang, halfway, "I was saying it for the third time, and you came to my call." She licked her red lips. "The way Mr. Howsen promised you would."

I didn't let on to know Mr. Howsen. I stuffed the red scarf into the hip pocket of my blue duckins. "Why were you witch-spelling me? What did I ever do to you? I disremember even where I've met you."

"You don't remember me? Remember Enderby Lodge, John."

Of course. A month ago I'd strolled through with my guitar. Old Major Enderby bid me rest my hat awhile. He was having a dance, and to pleasure him I sang for his guests.

"You must have been there," I said. "But what did I do to you?"

Her lips tightened, red and hard and sharp as her nails. "Nothing at all, John. You did nothing, you ignored me. Doesn't it make you furious to be ignored?"

"Ignored? I never notice such a thing."

"I do. I don't often look at a man twice, and usually they look at me at

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least once. I don't forgive being ignored." Again she licked her mouth, like a cat. "I'd been told a charm can be said three times, beside Bottomless Pool on Hark Mountain, to burn a man's soul with love. And you came when I called. Don't shake your head, John, you're in love with me."

"Sorry. I beg your pardon. I'm not in love with you."

She smiled in pride and scorn, like at a liar. "But you climbed Hark Mountain."

"Reckoned I'd like to see the Bottomless Pool."

"Only people like Mr. Howsen know about the Bottomless Pool. Bottomless pools usually mean the ones near Lake Lure, on Highway 74."

"Those aren't rightly bottomless," I said. "Anyway, I heard about this one, the real one, in a country song."

Slinging my guitar forward, I strummed and sang:

"Way up on Hark Mountain
I climb all alone,
Where the trail is untravelled,
The top is unknown.

"Way up on Hark Mountain
Is the Bottomless Pool.
You look in its waters
And they mirror a fool."

"You're making that up," she charged me.

"No, it was made up before my daddy's daddy was born. Most country songs have truth in them. The song brought me here, not your witch-spell."

She laughed, short and sharp, almost a yelp. "Call it the long arm of coincidence, John. You're here, anyway. Look in the water and see whether it mirrors a fool."

Plainly she didn't know the next verse, so I sang that

"You can boast of your learning
And brag of your sense,
It won't make no difference
A hundred years hence."

Stepping one foot on a poolside rock, I looked in.

It mirrored neither a fool nor a wise man. I could see down forever and ever, and I recollected all I'd ever heard norrated about the Bottomless Pool. How it was blue as the sky, but with a special light of its own; how no

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water ran into it, excusing some rain, but it stayed full; how you couldn't measure it, you could let down a sinker till the line broke of its own weight.

Though I couldn't spy out the bottom, it wasn't rightly dark down there. Like looking up into blue sky, I looked down into blue water, and in the blue was a many-color shine, like deep lights.

"I didn't need to use the stolen scarf," she said at my elbow: "You're lying about why you came. The spell brought you."

"I'm sorry to say, ma'am," I replied, "I don't even call your name to my mind."

"Do names make a difference if you love me? Call me Annalinda. I'm rich. I've been loved for that alone, and for myself alone."

"I'm plain and poor," I told her. "I was raised hard and put up wet. I don't have more than 60 cents in my old clothes. It wonders me, Miss Annalinda, why you need to bother."

"Because I'm not used to being ignored," she said again.

Down in the Bottomless Pool's blueness wasn't a fish, or a weed of grass. Only that deep-away sparkly flash of lights, changing as you spy changes on a bubble of soap blown by a little child.

Somebody cleared his throat and spoke, "I see the spell I gave you worked, ma'am."

I knew Mr. Howsen as he came up the trail to Hark Mountain's top.

He was purely ugly. I'd been knowing him ten years, and he looked as ugly that minute as the first time I'd seen him, with his mean face and his big hungry nose and the black patch over one eye. When he'd had both his eyes, they were so close together you'd swear he could look through a keyhole with the two of them at once.

"Yes," said Miss Annalinda. "I want to pay you what I owe you."

"No, you pay One Other," said Mr. Howsen, his hands in the pockets of the long black coat he wore summer and winter. "For value received, ma'am. I only passed his word along to you."

He tighted his lips at me, in what wasn't any smile. "John," he said, "you relish journeying. You've relished it since you were just a chap, going what way you felt like. You've seen a right much of this world. But she tolled you to her, and you'll stay with her, and you're obliged to One Other."

"One other what?" I asked him.

Though that was just a defy. Of course, hearing of Hark Mountain and the Bottomless Pool, I'd heard of One Other. That mountain folks say he's got the one arm and the one leg, that he runs on the one leg and grabs with the one arm, and what he grabs goes with him into the Bottomless Pool; that it's One Other's power and knowledge that lets witches do their spells next to Bottomless Pool.

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"Be here with the lady when One Other asks payment," he said. "That spell was good a many years before Theocritus written it down in Greek. It'll be good when English is as old as Greek is now. It tolled you here."

For the life of me, I couldn't remember seeing Miss Annalinda at Major Enderby's. "My will brought me, not hers," I said. "I wanted to see the Bottomless Pool. I wonder at the soap bubble color in it."

"Ain't any soap in there, John," said Mr. Howsen. "Soap bubbles don't get so big as to have that much color."

"You're rightly sure how big soap bubbles get, Mr. Howsen? Once I heard a science doctor say this whole life of ours, the heaven and the earth, the sun and moon and stars, hold a shape like a big soap bubble. He said it stretched and spread like a soap bubble, all the suns and stars and worlds getting farther apart as time passed."

"Both of you stay where you are," said Mr. Howsen. "One Other will want to find the both of you here."

"But —" Miss Annalinda made out to begin.

"Both of you stay," Mr. Howsen said again, and with his shoe toe he scuffed a mark across the trail. He hawked, and spit on the mark. "Don't cross that line. It would be worse for you than if fire burned you behind and before, inside and out."

Like a lizard he had bobbed over the edge and down the trail.

"Let's go, too," I said to Miss Annalinda, but she stared at the mark of Mr. Howsen's shoe toe, and the healthy blood had paled out from under the tan on her face.

"Pay him no mind," I said. "Let's start, it's toward evening."

"He said not to cross the mark," she reminded me, scared.

"I don't care a shuck for his saying. Come on, Miss Annalinda," and I took her by the arm.

That quick she was fighting me. Holding her arm was like holding the spoke of a runaway wheel. Her other hand racked hide and blood from my cheek, and she tried to bite. I couldn't hang on without hitting her, so I let her go, and she sat on a rock by the poolside and cried into her hands.

"Then I'll have to go alone," I said, and took a step.

"John!" she called, loud and shaky as a horse's whinny. "If you cross that mark, I'll throw myself into this Bottomless Pool!"

Sometimes you can tell a woman means her words. This was such a time. I walked back, and she looked to where the down-sunk sun made the sky's edge red and fiery. It would be cold and dark when the sun went. With trembling brown hands she rolled the blue jeans down her long legs.

"I'll build up the fire," I said, and tried to break a branch from a claw-looking tree.

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But it was tough and had thorny stickers. So I went to the edge of the clearing, away from where Mr. Howsen had drawn his mark on us, and found an armful of dead-fallen wood to freshen the fire she'd made for her witching. It blazed up, the color of the setting sun. High in the sky, that grew pale before it would grow dark, slid a big buzzard. Its wings flopped, slow and heavy, spreading their feathers like long fingers.

"You don't believe all this, John," said Miss Annalinda, in a voice that sounded as if she was just before freezing with cold. "But the spell was true. The rest of it's true, too — about One Other. He must have been here since the beginning of time."

"There's one thing peculiar enough to the truth," I answered her. "Nothing's been norrated about One Other until the last year or so. Nothing about his being here at the Bottomless Pool, or about folks being able to do witch stuff, or how he aids the witches and takes payment for his aid. It's no old country tale, it's right new and recent."

"Payment," she said after me. "What kind of payment?"

I poked the fire. "That depends. Sometimes one thing, sometimes another. You notice Mr. Howsen goes around with only one eye. I've heard it sworn that One Other took an eye from him. Maybe he won't want an eye from you, but he'll want something. Something for nothing."

"What do you mean?" and she frowned her brows.

"You witched me to love you, but you don't love me. It was done for spite, not love."

"Why — why —"

Nothing flurries a woman like being caught in the truth. She laid hold on a poolside rock next to her.

"That will smash my head or either my guitar," I gave her warning. "Smash my head, you're up here alone with a dead corpse. Smash my guitar, I'll go down the trail."

"And I'll jump into the pool."

"All right, jump. I won't stay where people throw rocks at me. Fair warning's as good as a promise."

She let go the rock. She was ready to cry again. My foot at the edge, I looked down in the water.

The sky was getting purely dark, but low and away down was that soap bubble shiny light. I remembered an old tale they say came from the Indians that owned the mountains before white folks came. It was about people living above the sky and thinking their world was the only one, till somebody pulled up a big long root, and through the hole they could see another world below, where people lived. Then Miss Annalinda began to talk.

She was talking for company, and she talked about herself. About her rich

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father and her rich mother, and her rich aunts and uncles, the money and automobiles and land and horses she owned, the big chance of men who wanted to marry her. One was the son of folks as rich as hers. One was the governor of a state, who'd put his wife away if Miss Annalinda said the word. One was a nobleborn man from a foreign country. "And you'd marry me too, John," she said.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Sorry to death. But I wouldn't."

"You're lying, John."

"I never lie, Miss Annalinda."

"Well, talk to me, anyway. This is no place for silence."

I talked in my turn. How I'd been born next to Drowning Creek and baptized in its waters. How my folks had died in two days of each other, how an old teacher lady taught me to read and write, and I taught myself to play the guitar. How I'd roamed and rambled. How I'd fought in the war, and a thousand fell at my side and ten thousand at my right hand, but it hadn't come nigh me. I left out things like meeting up with the Ugly Bird or visiting the desrick on Yandro. I said that though I'd never had anything and never rightly expected to have anything, I'd always made out for bread to eat and sometimes butter on it.

"How about girls, John?" she asked me. "You must have had regiments of them."

"None to mention," I said, for it wouldn't be proper to name them, or the like of that. "Miss Annalinda, it's full dark."

"And the moon's up," she said.

"No, that's the soap bubble light from down in the pool."

"You make me shiver!" she scolded, and drew up her shoulders. "What do you mean with that stuff about soap bubbles?"

"Only what I told Mr. Howsen. The science man said our whole life, what he called our universe, was swelling and stretching out, so that suns and moons and stars pull farther apart all the time. He said our world and all the other worlds are inside that stretching skin of suds that makes the bubble. We can't study out what's outside the bubble, or either inside, just the suds part. It sounds crazyish, but when he talked it sounded true."

"It's not a new idea, John. James Jeans wrote a book, *The Expanding Universe*. But where does the soap bubble come from?"

"I reckon Whoever made things must have blown it from a bubble pipe too big for us to figure about."

She snickered, so she must be feeling better. "You believe in a God Who blew only one lone soap bubble." Then she didn't snicker. "How long must we wait here?"

"No time. We can go."

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"No, we have to stay."

"Then we'll wait till One Other comes. He'll come. Mr. Howsen's a despicable man, but he knows about One Other."

"Oh!" she cried out. "I wish he'd come and get it over with."

And her wish came true.

The firelight had risen high, and as she spoke something hiked up behind the rocks on the pool's edge. It hiked up like a wet black leech, but much bigger by a thousand times. It slid and oozed to the top of a rock and as it waited a second, wet and shiny in the firelight, it looked as if somebody had flung down a wet coat. Then it hunched and swelled, and its edges came apart.

It was a hand, as broad in the back as a shovel, with fingers as long as a hayfork's tines.

"Get up and start down trail," I said to Miss Annalinda, as quiet and calm as I could make out to be. "Don't argue, just start."

"Why?" she snapped, without moving, and by then she saw, too, and any chance for escape was gone.

The hayfork fingers grabbed the rock, and a head and shoulder heaved up where we could see them.

The shoulder was a cypress root humping out of water, and the head was a dark pumpkin, round and smooth and bald, with no face, only two eyes. They were green, not bright green like cat eyes or dog eyes in the night. They were stale rotten green, like something spoiled.

Miss Annalinda's shriek was like a train at a crossing. She jumped up, but she didn't run. Maybe she couldn't. Then a big knee lifted into sight, and all of One Other came out of the water and rose straight up above us.

Miss Annalinda wilted down on her knees, almost in the fire. I dropped the guitar and jumped to pull her clear. She mumbled a holy name — not a prayer or either a curse, just the tag end of a habit most of us almost lose, the reminding of Someone that we're hurting for a little help. I stood, holding her sagging slim body against me, and looked high up at where One Other loomed.

One Other was twice as tall as a tall man, and it was sure enough true that he had only one arm and one leg. The arm would be his left arm, and the leg his left leg. Maybe that's why the mountain folks named him One Other. But his stale green eyes were two, and both of them looked down at us. He made a sure hop toward us on his big single foot, big and flat as a table top, and he put out his hand to touch or to grab.

I dragged Miss Annalinda clear around the fire. I reckon she'd fainted, or near to. Her feet didn't work under her, she only moaned, and she was double heavy, the way a limp weight can be. My strength was under tax to

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pull her toward where I'd dropped the guitar. I wanted to get my hands on that guitar. It might be a weapon — its music or its silver strings might be a distaste to an unchancey thing like One Other.

But One Other had circled the fire the opposite way, so that we came almost in touch again. He stood on his one big foot, between me and my guitar. It might be ill or well to him, but I couldn't reach it and find out.

Even then, I never thought of running across Mr. Howsen's mark and down the mountain in the night. I stood still, holding Miss Annalinda on her feet that were so limp her shoes were like to drop off, and looked up twice my height into what wasn't a face save for the two green eyes.

"What have you got in mind?" I asked One Other, as if he could understand my talk; and the words, almost in Miss Annalinda's ear, brought back her strength and wits. She stood alone, still shoving herself close against me. She looked up at One Other and said the holy name again.

One Other bent his big lumpy knee, and sank his bladdery dark body down and put out that big splay paw of his. The firelight showed his open palm, slate gray, with things dribbling out in a clinking, jangling little strew at our feet. He straightened up again.

"Oh!" And Miss Annalinda dropped down to grab. "Look — he's giving us —"

Tugging my eyes from One Other's, I looked at what she held out. It shone and lighted up, like a hailstone by lantern light. It was the size of a hen egg, and it had a many little edges and flat faces, all full of fire, pale and blue outside and innerly many-colored like the soap bubble light in the Bottomless Pool. She shoved it into my hand, and it felt sticky and slippery, like soap. I let it fall on the ground again.

"You fool, that's a diamond!" she squeaked at me. "It's bigger than the Orloff! Bigger than the Koh-i-noor!"

She scrabbled with both hands for more of the shiny things, that lighted up with every color you could call for. "Here's an emerald," she yipped, "and here's a ruby! John, he's our friend, he likes us, he's giving us things worth more money than —"

On her knees before One Other, she gathered two fistfuls of those things he'd flung down for her to pick up. But I had my eyes back on him. He looked at me — not at her, he was sure of her. He knew humankind's greed for shiny stones. About me he wasn't sure yet. He studied me as I've seen folks study an animal, to see where to hit with a stick or slice with a skinning knife. The shiny stones didn't fetch me. He'd find something that would.

I know how like a crazy tale to scare young ones this sounds. But there and then, One Other was so plain to see and make out, the way you'd see him if I was to make a clay image of him and stand it up on one leg in your

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sight, and it grew till it was twice as tall as you, with stale green eyes and one hayfork paw and one tabletop foot. In a moment with no sound, he and I looked at each other. Miss Annalinda, down on the ground between us, gopped and goggled at the stones she gathered in her hands. Then the silence broke. A drip of water fell. Another. *Drip*, *drip*, *drip*, like what Miss Annalinda had dripped into the fire — water from the Bottomless Pool, dripping off of One Other's body and head and his one arm and one leg.

Then he turned his eyes and mind back to Miss Annalinda, for long enough to spare me for a jump past him at my guitar.

He turned quick and swung down at me with his paw, but I had it and was running backward. I got the guitar across me, my left hand on the frets, and my right hand clawing the silver strings. They sang out, and One Other teetered on his broad sole, cocked his head to listen.

I started the Last Judgment Song, that in my boyhood old Uncle T. P. Hinnard had said was good against evil things:

"Three holy kings, four holy saints,
At heaven's high gate that stand,
Speak out and bid all evil wait,
And stir no foot or hand. . . ."

But he came at me. The charm didn't serve against One Other, as I'd been vowed to it'd serve against any evil in the world. One Other wasn't of this world, though just now he was in it. He was from the Bottomless Pool, and from whatever was beyond, below, behind where its bottom should be.

I ran around the fire and around Miss Annalinda still crouched down among those jewels. After me he hopped, like the almightiest big one-legged rabbit in song or story. He had me almost headed off, coming alongside me, and I ran right through the fire that was less fear to face than he was. My shoes spurned its coals as I ran through. On the far side I made myself stop and look back. I still had to face him somehow. I couldn't just run from him and leave Miss Annalinda to pay, all alone for her foolishness.

He'd stopped, too, in his one track. The fire, scattered by my feet, blazed up in scattered chunks, and he was sort of pulling himself together, back away from it. *Drip*, *drip*, the water fell from him. I felt I couldn't stand that dripping noise, and I sang another verse of the Last Judgment Song:

"The fire from heaven will fall at last
On wealth and pride and power,
We will not know the minute, and
We will not know the hour. . . ."

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One Other hopped a long hop back, away from the fire and from me and from the song.

Something whispered me what I'd needed to know.

From out of the water he'd come. If I didn't want him to get me; to make me sell out at a price I'd never redeem — as jewels beyond all reckoning could buy Miss Annalinda — I'd have to fight him like any water-thing.

Fight fire with water, the wise folks say for a saying. Fire and water are enemies. Fight water with fire.

He circled around again, and I didn't flee this time. I grabbed toward the scattered fire. One Other's flat hand slapped me spinning away, but my own fist had snatched a burning chunk. When I staggered back onto my feet, I still held my guitar in one hand, and the chunk in the other.

I whipped that fire around my head, and it blazed up like pure lightwood. As One Other stooped for me again, I rushed to meet him and shoved the fire at him.

He couldn't face it. He broke back from it. I jumped sidewise, myself, so he was between me and the fire, and sashayed the burning stick at him again. He jumped back. His foot slammed down into the fire.

I hope none of you all ever hear such a sound as he made, with no mouth to make it. Not a yell or a roar or a scream, but Hark Mountain's whole top hummed and danced to it. He flung himself out of the fire again, and I dashed my torch like a spear for where his face should be, and made a direct hit.

I tell you, he couldn't face fire, he couldn't stand it. He spun around and dived into the water from which he'd come, into the Bottomless Pool, with a splash like a wagon falling from a bridge. Running to the rocks, I saw him cleave down below there into the deep clearness like a diving one-legged frog — among the soap bubble colors, getting so small he looked a hand's size, a finger's size, a bean's size. And then light gulped him. Then I stepped back to the scattered fire.

Miss Annalinda still huddled on the ground. I question whether she'd paid any attention to what had gone on. Her hands were full of jewels, shining green, red, blue, white.

I put out my hand and pulled her to her feet. "Give those to me," I said.

Her eyes stabbed at me like fish-gigs. She couldn't believe that I'd said such words. I took her right wrist and pried open her right hand, trying not to hurt her, and got the jewels out of it. Into the Bottomless Pool I plugged them, one by one. They splashed and sank like pebbles.

"Don't!" she screamed, but I took her other hand and pried away the rest of them. *Plop*. I threw one after the first bunch. *Plop*. I threw another. *Plop*, *plop*, *plop*, more.

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"They were a fortune," she whimpered, clawing at my arm. "The greatest fortune ever dreamed of."

"No, not a fortune," I said. " A misfortune. The greatest misfortune ever dreamed of."

"But — no —"

I threw the rest in. *Plop, plop,* the rest of the jewels. "What would you have given for them?" I asked her.

"Anything — anything —"

"You mean everything. If he paid high for us, he meant to have his worth from us. He needs folks to serve him, more folks than Mr. Howsen." I waved for her to look into the pool. "I hope he stays where things are more comfortable than what I gave him to taste."

She looked down to where the pool should have a bottom. "John, you're right," she said, as if she dreamed. "Those colors do look like soap bubble tints, stretched out, with nothing we can imagine beyond the film of suds. A great big soap bubble, like the one you say the Creator blew."

"Maybe," I said, "there's more than one soap bubble. Maybe there's a right many. Each one a life and universe strange to us."

The pain of that new thought made her silent. I went on.

"Maybe there's two soap bubbles touching. Maybe the spot where they come together is where something can leave one sort of life and come into another."

She sat down. The new thought was weight as well as pain. "Oh," she said.

"Maybe some born venturer would dare try to move into the new bubble," I said, "through whatever maybe matches the Bottomless Pool on the far side, in that other world. Maybe, I say. There's a God's plenty of maybes."

"They aren't maybes," she said all of a sudden. "You saw him. No such creature was ever born in our world. A creature looking like that must be —"

"You still don't understand," and I shook my head. "I don't reckon he looks like that in his own soap bubble. He made himself look like that, to be as much as possible like our kind, here in this world. We can't guess what he looks like naturally."

"I don't want to guess," she said, as if she was about to cry.

"A stranger like that needs friends and helpers in the strange place. Some of the things he knows from his own home are like power here, power we don't understand and think is witch stuff. But he'd pay high for helpers, like Mr. Howsen and like us."

"Will he come back?" she asked.

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"Not right away." I picked up my guitar. "Let's head down trail as far as we can grope in the dark, and if he does come back he won't find us. If we can't grope all the way down, we'll build a fire somewhere below and wait for light to show us the rest of the way."

"You were right about me, John," said Miss Annalinda, starting to gabble fast. "You saw all through me, my spell was to get you up here for spite. But it's not spite any more, John, it's love, it's love — I love you, John —"

"You know," I right away changed the subject, "there's one more thing about this soap bubble idea. The soap bubble we live in keeps stretching and swelling. But a soap bubble can't last forever. Some time or other, it stretches and swells so tight, it just bursts."

That did what I was after. It stopped her flood of words. She stared up and away and all around. I saw the whites of her eyes glitter in the last of the fireglow.

"Bursts?" she said slowly. "Then what?"

"Then nothing, Miss Annalinda. When a soap bubble bursts, it's gone."

And we had silence to start our climb down Hark Mountain.

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JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY BOOKS

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There are no limits to the ever-expanding universe of science fiction; we fully expect to see it shortly appearing in Better Homes and Gardens *and the* Journal of English and Germanic Philology. *The latest market to succumb to the invasion from outer space is that backbone (or at least funny bone) of Empire,* Punch; *and the delightful result is, as you might expect, like nothing yet seen on this side of the Atlantic.*

Manuscript Found in a Vacuum

by P. M HUBBARD

ON THE FIFTH day of September in the Year of Our Lord, 2259, I being then in the command of His Majesty's ship *Supersonic*, a frigate of 40 rockets and fourth of her name in His Majesty's fleet, and she being then upon the Venus station, my crew did mutiny and put me off in the long boat, with victuals and oxygen for but ten days, to perish or survive as space should suffer me: and little indeed cared they, and would have made my scanty provision still less but for the intercession of the ship's cook, who, being but a simple biochemist, nor even of unmixed blood (but having the green hair and telescopic eyes of the Terro-Martian), had yet more charity than they all. I had done this fellow some service, having given him refuge aboard when the officers of his own planet (his mother was a Martian, of the Canal Zone, his father being, as I suppose, a man of our armies during the late war) would have vaporized him for smuggling ashore a bottle of cow's milk, which is much prized among them, in the oxygen tank of his helmet: and good cause had I now to be glad I had done so. For I went eight days in space; but upon the eighth night, my oxygen being all but spent, and for the rest having, as we say, neither protein nor proton, I heard breakers ahead, and found myself shortly in much atmosphere (though of what kind I could not tell), and soon, my boat being swept on by a strong current of gravity, I knew I was near land.

And now my boat, having no longer fuel with which it might make way in such an air, was at the mercy of the current, and was like to dash itself upon the land, and me with it: so that being resolved to stake all upon the venture, I cast myself into the air, as we say, to fall or fly. The air was, I found, tolerably oxygenated and, with some adjustment of my

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lung-filter, sweet enough to breathe. I am accounted a good flyer, having from my youth up been accustomed to such exercise (my father being a ferry pilot on the lunar service); and now I flew strongly and came safely to land, though with little enough about me save the space-skin and helmet in which I stood upright.

The sphere upon which I found myself is small and its climate equable. From such observations as I have been able to make (being without the aid of my astrophysical instruments) I fancy myself upon an uncharted moon of Venus; from the which, there being since the Peace more traffic in these regions, I must count on some chance landfall to deliver me.

5th December, 2259

No relief yet, it being now near three months, as I reckon, since I came here. Howbeit, I have been favoured by fortune beyond expectation. The people of this sphere (which I at first supposed uninhabited), being simple, kindly folk, in feature much like the Venusians, though with three eyes less and somewhat longer antennae, but in colour more like the Martians, the skin being green and squamous, have entreated me kindly and done me much honour. They have, in their ignorance, no command of nuclear fission, but make shift to move through the nearer air in great machines by the crude combustion of gases, as did our primitive ancestors; yet having in one of their volcanoes vast wealth of Peritoneum, for but a little of which, did they but know it, our Planet and Mars fought the late bloody and protracted war. Having but my pocket cyclotron about me, and being myself, in truth, but a poor physicist (of which idleness in my schooldays I now heartily repent), I have yet established factories and done much trade with them, and am in the way, could I but get off this sphere, to amass huge riches and be of great service to His Majesty.

5th January, 2260

It being now four months since I came here, and being yet unrelieved, I am resolved to commit these records to space, in the hope that whoever chance upon them may find means to relieve me. Yet first let them seek out His Majesty's ship *Supersonic* and apprehend her rascally crew, who, if they have come to land, have, I doubt not, given false report of my decease in space: and in particular let them seize and without compunction vaporize at the jet-end the ring-leaders of their mutiny, viz. James Brown, stellar navigator, able spaceman Lee Pong Ho, Karl Sokoff, rocketeer, and Alfred Spudd, master decontaminator; but let them spare Trog, ship's cook, for the kindness rendered to me as aforementioned.

Dated the Fifth day of January, 2260. — Julius Kauntz, *Captain*, R.N.

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According to her own written confession, Ann Warren Griffith has been an actress, a librarian, a shipfitter, a pilot in the WASPS, a Red Cross "overseas-type girl," an "editorial assistant-type girl" on trade magazines and, of course, a writer. Her work has been in such magazines as the Atlantic Monthly, Reader's Digest, The Woman . . . *although, she wistfully admits, she has not yet hit the* Macaroni Journal. *("1500-word articles on macaroni, spaghetti, noodles, etc.") She is also, for our money, one hell of an extrapolator! Where too many science fiction scribes content themselves with postulating the same old atomic blowup, Miss Griffith has concocted a truly awful catastrophe for the world of 1984, one that is almost too awful for civilized man to think about.*

Captive Audience

by ANN WARREN GRIFFITH

MAVIS BASCOM READ the letter hastily and passed it across the breakfast table to her husband, Fred, who read the first paragraph and exclaimed, "She'll be here this afternoon!" but neither Mavis nor the two children heard him because the cereal box was going "Boom! Boom!" so loudly. Presently it stopped and the bread said urgently, "One good slice deserves another! How about another slice all round, eh, Mother?" Mavis put four slices into the toaster, and then there was a brief silence. Fred wanted to discuss the impending visit, but his daughter Kitty got in ahead of him, saying,

"Mom, it's my turn to choose the next cereal, and this shot-from-a-cannon stuff is almost gone. Will you take me to the store this afternoon?"

"Yes, dear, of course. I must admit I'll be glad when this box is gone. 'Boom, boom, boom,' that's all it ever says. And some of the others have such nice songs and jingles. I don't see whyever you picked it, Billy."

Billy was about to answer when his father's cigarette package interrupted, "Yessir, time to light up a Chesterfield! Time to enjoy that first mild, satisfying smoke of the day."

Fred lit a cigarette and said angrily, "Mavis, you know I don't like you to say such things in front of the children. It's a perfectly good commercial,

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and when you cast reflections on one, you're undermining all of them. I won't have you confusing these kids!"

"I'm sorry, Fred," was all Mavis had time to answer, because the salt box began a long and technically very interesting talk on iodization.

Since Fred had to leave for the office before the talk was over, he telephoned back to Mavis about her grandmother's visit. "Mavis," he said, "she can't stay with us! You'll have to get her out just as soon as possible."

"All right, Fred. I don't think she'll stay very long anyway. You know she doesn't like visiting us anymore than you like having her."

"Well, the quicker she goes the better. If anybody down here finds out about her I'll be washed up with MV the same day!"

"Yes, Fred, I know. I'll do the best I can."

Fred had been with the Master Ventriloquism Corporation of America for fifteen years. His work had been exceptional in every respect and, unless word leaked out about Mavis' grandmother, he could expect to remain with it for the rest of his life. He had enjoyed every step of the way from office boy to his present position as Assistant Vice-President in Charge of Sales, though he sometimes wished he could have gone into the technical end of it. Fascinating, those huge batteries of machines pouring out their messages to the American people. It seemed to him almost miraculous, the way the commercials were broadcast into thin air and picked up by the tiny discs embedded in the bottle or can or box or whatever wrapping contained the product, but he knew it involved some sort of electronic process that he couldn't understand. Such an incredibly complex process, yet unfailingly accurate! He had never heard of the machines making a mistake; never, for instance, had they thrown a shoe polish commercial so that it came out of a hair tonic bottle. Intrigued though he was by the mechanical intricacies of Master Ventriloquism, however, he had no head for that sort of thing, and was content to make his contribution in the sales end.

And quite a contribution it was. Already in the two short years since his promotion to Assistant Vice-President he had signed up two of the toughest clients that had ever been brought into the MV camp. First had been the telephone company, now one of the fattest accounts on the Corporation's books. They had held out against MV for years, until he, Fred, hit upon the idea that sold them — a simple message to come from every telephone, at fifteen-minute intervals throughout the MV broadcasting day, reminding people to look in the directory before dialing information. After the telephone company coup, Fred became known around the Corporation as a man to watch. He hadn't rested on his laurels. He had, if anything, topped his telephone performance. MV had pretty much given up hope of selling its services to the dignified, the conservative New York *Times*.

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But Fred went ahead and did it. He'd kept the details a secret from Mavis. She'd see it for the first time tomorrow morning. Tomorrow morning! Damn! Grandmother would be here. You could bet she'd make some crack and spoil the whole thing.

Fred honestly didn't know if he would have gone ahead and married Mavis if he'd known about her grandmother.

For the sad fact of the matter was that Grandmother had never adjusted to MV. She was the only person he and Mavis knew who still longed for the "good old days," as she called them, the days before MV, and she yapped about them *ad nauseam*. She and her "A man's home is his castle" — if he'd heard her say it once he'd heard her say it 500 times. Unfortunately, it wasn't just that Grandmother was a boring old fool who refused to keep up with the times. The sadder fact of the matter was that she had broken the law, and today was finishing a five-year prison term. Did any other man here at MV have such a cross to bear?

Again and again he and Mavis had warned Grandmother that her advanced years would not keep her from being clapped into jail, and they hadn't. She'd gone absolutely wild on the day the Supreme Court had handed down the Earplug Decision. It was the climax of a long and terribly costly fight by the MV Corporation. The sale of earplugs had grown rapidly during the years MV was expanding, and just at a peak period, when MV had over 3,000 accounts, National Earplug Associates, Inc. had boldly staged a country-wide campaign advertising earplugs as the last defense against MV. The success of the campaign was such that the Master Ventriloquism Corporation found itself losing hundreds of accounts. MV sued immediately and the case dragged through the courts for years. Judges had a hard time making up their minds. Some sections of the press twaddled about "captive audiences." The MV Corporation felt reasonably certain that the Supreme Court justices were sensible men, but with its very existence at stake there was nerve-wracking suspense until the decision was made. National Earplug Associates, Inc. was found guilty of Restraint of Advertising, and earplugs were declared unconstitutional.

Grandmother, who was visiting Fred and Mavis at the time, hit the ceiling. She exhausted herself and them with her tirades, and swore that never never never would she give up her earplugs.

MV's representatives in Washington soon were able to get Congress to put teeth into the Supreme Court's decision, and eventually, just as Fred and Mavis predicted, Grandmother joined the ridiculous band who went to jail for violating the law prohibiting the use or possession of earplugs.

That was some skeleton for anybody, let alone an executive of MV, to have in his closet! Luckily, it had, up to now, remained in the closet, for-

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at no time during her trial or afterwards did Grandmother mention having a relative who worked for the Corporation. But they had been lulled into a false sense of security. They assumed that Grandmother would die before finishing her prison term and that the problem of Grandmother was, therefore, solved. Now they were faced with it all over again. How were they going to keep her from shooting off her mouth before their friends and neighbors? How persuade her to go away and live in some distant spot?

Fred's secretary broke in on these worrisome thoughts, bringing him an unusually large batch of morning mail. "Seems there's kind of an unfavorable reaction to the new Pratt's Airotsac campaign. Forty-seven letters of protest already — read 'em and weep," she said saucily, and returned to her own office.

Fred picked a letter out of the pile and read:

> Dear Sirs,
> Like most mothers, I give my baby Pratt's Airotsac every time she cries for it. For the past few days, however, it has seemed to me that she has cried for it much more often than usual. Then I heard about the new Pratt's Airotsac commercial, and caught on that part of the time it wasn't my baby but the MV baby crying. I think it's a very cute idea, but am wondering if you could possibly use another baby because the one you have now sounds so much like mine and I cannot tell them apart so that I do not know when my baby is actually crying for Pratt's Airotsac and when it's the MV baby.
> Thanking you in advance for anything you can do about this, and with all good wishes for your continued success, I am,
> Mrs. Mona P. Hayes.

Fred groaned and flipped through some of the other letters. The story was the same — mothers not knowing whether it was their own baby or the MV baby and consequently confused as to when to administer the medicine. Dopes! Why didn't they have sense enough to put the Airotsac bottle at the other end of the house from the baby, and then they could tell by the direction the sound came from whether it was a bona fide baby or an advertising baby! Well, he'd have to figure out some way to change it, since many of the letters reported babies getting sick from overdoses. The Master Ventriloquism Corporation certainly didn't want to be responsible for that sort of thing.

Underneath the 47 complaints was a memo from the Vice-President in Charge of Sales, congratulating Fred on his brilliant handling of the New York *Times*. Ordinarily, this would have made it a red-letter day, but what with Grandmother and Pratt's, Fred's day was already ruined.

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Mavis' day was not going well, either.

She felt uneasy, out-of-sorts, and in the lull between the Breakfast Commercials and the Cleaning Commercials she tried to analyze her feelings. It must be Grandmother. Perhaps it was true, as Fred said, that Grandmother was a bad influence. It wasn't that she was *right*. Mavis believed in Fred, because he was her husband, and believed in the MV Corporation, because it was the largest corporation in the entire United States. Nevertheless, it upset her when Fred and Grandmother argued, as they almost always did when they were together.

Anyway, maybe this time Grandmother wouldn't be so troublesome. Maybe jail had taught her how wrong it was to try to stand in the way of progress. On this hopeful note her thinking ended, for the soap powder box cried out, "Good morning, Mother! What say we go after those breakfast dishes and give our hands a beauty treatment at the same time? You know, Mother, no other soap gives you a beauty treatment *while* you wash your dishes. Only So-Glow, So-Glow, right here on your shelf, waiting to help *you*. So let's begin, shall we?"

While washing the dishes, Mavis was deciding what dessert to prepare. She'd bought several new ones the day before, and now they all sounded so good she couldn't make up her mind which to use first. The commercial for the canned apple pie ingredients was a little playlet, about a husband coming home at the end of a long hard day, smelling the apple pie, rushing out to the kitchen, sweeping his wife off her feet, kissing her and saying, "That's my girl!" It sounded promising to Mavis, especially when the announcer said any housewife who got to work right this minute and prepared that apple pie could be almost certain of getting that reaction from her husband.

Then there was a cute jingle from the devil's-food cake mix, sung by a trio of girls' voices with a good swing band in the background. If she'd made the mistake of buying only one box, it said, she ought to go out and buy another before she started baking because one of these luscious devil's-food cakes would not be enough for her hungry family. It was peppy and made Mavis feel better. She checked her shelves and, finding she had only one box, jotted it down on her shopping list.

Next, from the gingerbread mix box, came a homey type commercial that hit Mavis all wrong with its: "MMMMMMMMM, yes! Just like Grandmother used to make!"

After listening to several more, she finally decided to use a can of crushed pineapple. "It's quick! It's easy! Yes, Mother, all you do is chill and serve." That was what she needed, feeling the way she did.

She finished the dishes and was just leaving the kitchen when the floor

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wax bottle called out, "Ladies, look at your floors! You know that others judge you by your floors. Are you proud of yours? Are they ready — spotless and gleaming for the most discerning friend who might drop in?" Mavis looked at her floors. Definitely, they needed attention. She gave them a hasty going over with the quick-drying wax, grateful, as she so often was, to MV for reminding her.

In rapid succession, then, MV announced that now it was possible to polish her silverware to a higher, brighter polish than ever before; wondered if she weren't perhaps guilty of "H.O. — Hair Odor," and shouldn't perhaps wash her hair before her husband came home; told her at three different times to relax with a glass of cola; suggested that she had been neglecting her nails and might profit from a new coat of enamel; asked her to give a thought to her windows; and reminded her that her home permanent neutralizer would lose its wonderful effectiveness the longer it was kept. By early afternoon she had done the silver and the windows, given herself a shampoo and a manicure, determined to give Kitty a home permanent that very afternoon, and was full of cola. But she was exhausted.

It *was* a responsibility to be the wife of an MV executive. You had to be sort of an example to the rest of the community. Only sometimes she got so tired! Passing the bathroom, she was attracted by a new bottle of pills that Fred had purchased. It was saying, "You know, folks, this is the time of day when you need a lift. Yessir, if you're feeling listless, tired, run down, put some iron back in your backbone! All you do is take off my top, take out one tablet, swallow it, and feel your strength return!" Mavis was about to do so when an aspirin bottle called out, "I go to work instantly!" and then another aspirin bottle (Why *did* Fred keep buying new ones before they'd finished up the old ones? It made things so confusing!) said, "I go to work twice as fast!" Aspirin, Mavis suddenly realized, was what she needed. She had a splitting headache, but heavens, how did one know which to take? One of each seemed the only fair solution.

When the children came home from school, Kitty refused to have her hair permanented until her mother took her to the store, as promised. Mavis felt almost unable to face it. What was it Grandmother used to call their supermarket? Hell on earth, hell on wheels, something like that. Mavis, of course, understood that simultaneous MV messages were necessary in the stores in order to give every product a chance at its share of the consumer dollar, but just this afternoon she did wish she could skip it.

Having promised, though, there was nothing to do but get it over with. Billy had to come along too, naturally — both the children loved visiting the supermarket more than most anything else. They made their way down the aisles through a chorus of "Try me . . . Try me . . . Here is

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the newer, creamier . . . Mother, your children will . . . Kiddies, ask Mom to pick the bright green and red package . . . Here I am, right here, the shortening all your friends have been telling you about. . . ."

Billy listened to as many as he could while they were passing by, and for the thousandth time wished that he could hear the store-type commercials at home. Why, some of them were just as good as the home-type! He always tried to talk the supermarket checkers out of tearing off the Buy-Me-Discs, but they always grumbled that them was their orders and they didn't have no time to bother with him. That was one of the reasons Billy had long since decided to be a supermarket checker himself when he grew up. Think of it! Not only would you hear the swell home-type commercials all day while you worked, and be hep to the very latest ones, but you'd get to hear all the store commercials too. And what with the thousands of Buy-Me-Discs he'd be tearing off, as a Checker, he bet he could slip some into his pockets from time to time, and then wouldn't his friends envy him, being able to receive store-type commercials at home!

They reached the cereal area, and as always the children were entranced. Their faces shone with excitement as they picked up one box after another, to hear the commercials more clearly. There were sounds of gunfire; all kinds of snapping, crackling, and popping; there were loud shouts of "CRISPIER! NUTTIER! YUMMIER!" There were more modulated appeals, addressed to Mother, about increased nourishment and energy-building; there were the voices of athletes, urging the kids to come on and be one of the gang; there were whinnies of horses and explosive sounds of jets and rockets; there were cowboy songs and hillbilly songs and rhymes and jingles and bands and quartets and trios! Poor Kitty! How could she ever choose?

Mavis waited patiently for twenty minutes, enjoying the children's pleasure even though her headache was growing worse, and then told Kitty that she really must make up her mind.

"OK, Mom, I'll take this one this time," said Kitty. She held the box close to her mother's ear. "Listen to it, Mom, isn't it swell?" Mavis heard a shattering command, "FORWARD, MARCH!" and then what sounded like a thousand marching men. "Crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch," they were shouting in unison, above the noise of their marching feet, and a male chorus was singing something about Crunchies were marching to your breakfast table, right into your cereal bowl. Suddenly, inexplicably, Mavis felt she couldn't stand this every morning. "No, Kitty," she said, rather harshly, "you can't have that one. I won't have all that marching and shouting at breakfast!" Kitty's pretty face turned to a thundercloud, and tears sprang into her eyes. "I'll tell Daddy what you said! I'll tell

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Daddy if you don't let me have it!" Mavis came to her senses as quickly as she had taken leave of them. "I'm sorry, dear, I don't know what came over me. Of course you can have it. It's a very nice one. Now let's hurry on home so we can give you your permanent before Grandmother comes."

Grandmother arrived just in time for dinner. She kissed the children warmly, though they didn't remember her, and seemed glad to see Mavis and Fred. But it soon became clear that she was the same old Grandmother. She tried, at table, to shout above the dinner commercials, until Mavis had to shush her or the family would have missed them, and she nearly succeeded in spoiling their pleasure in the new Tummy's campaign, which they had been eagerly looking forward to for several days.

Fred knew the kids were going to like it. He had a brand new roll of Tummys in his pocket, all ready to receive it. It was nicely timed — just as Fred was finishing his pineapple came a loud and unmistakable belch. The children looked startled and then burst into laughter. Mavis looked shocked, and then joined the laughter as a man's voice said, "Embarrassing, isn't it? Supposing that had been *you!* But what's worse is the distress of suppressing stomach gases. Why risk either the embarrassment or the discomfort? Take a Tummy after each meal and avoid the risk of (the belch was repeated, sending the children into fresh gales of laughter). Yes, folks, be sure it doesn't happen to YOU."

Fred handed Tummys to all of them amidst exclamations from the children, "Gee, Daddy, that's the best yet," and "I can't wait for tomorrow night to hear it again!" Mavis thought it was "very good, very effective." Grandmother, however, took her Tummy tablet, dropped it on the floor, and ground it to powder with her foot. Fred and Mavis exchanged despairing glances.

That evening the children were allowed to sit up late so they could talk to their great-grandmother after the MV went off at 11. They had been told she'd just returned from a "trip," and when they asked her about it now she made up stories of far away places where she'd been, where there wasn't any MV. Then she went on, while they grew bored, to tell them stories of her girlhood, before MV was invented, long before, as she said, "that fatal day when the Supreme Court opened the door to MV by deciding that defenseless passengers on busses had to listen to commercials whether they wanted to or not."

"But didn't they *like* to hear the commercials?" Billy asked.

Fred smiled to himself. Sound kid. Sound as a dollar. Grandmother could talk herself cross-eyed but Billy wouldn't fall for that stuff.

"No," Grandmother said, and she seemed very sad, "they didn't like them." She made a visible effort to pull herself together. "You know,

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Fred, the liquor business is missing a big opportunity. Why, if there were a bottle of Old Overholt here right now, saying, 'Drink me, drink me,' I'd do it!"

Fred took the hint and mixed three nightcaps.

"As a matter of fact," Mavis said, looking proudly at her husband, "Fred can claim a lot of the credit for that. All those liquor companies begged and pleaded with him for time, offered piles of money and everything, but Fred didn't think it would be a good influence in the home, having bottles around telling you to drink them, and I think he's right. He turned down a whole lot of money!"

"That was indeed splendid of Fred. I congratulate him." Grandmother drank her drink thirstily and looked at her watch. "We'd all better get to bed. You look tired, Mavis, and one must, I assume, especially in this household, be up with the MV in the morning."

"Oh yes, we usually are, and tomorrow," Mavis said excitedly, "Fred has a wonderful surprise for us. Some big new account he's gotten and he won't tell us what it is, but it's going to start tomorrow."

Next morning as the Bascoms and Grandmother were sitting down to breakfast there was a loud knock at the door.

"That's it!" shouted Fred. "Come on, everybody!"

They all ran to the door and Fred threw it open. Nobody was there, but a copy of the New York *Times* was lying on the doorstep, saying,

"Good morning, this is your New York *Times!* Wouldn't you like to have me delivered to your door *every* morning? Think of the added convenience, the added. . . ." Mavis pulled Fred out onto the lawn where he could hear her. "Fred!" she cried, "the New York *Times* — you sold the New York *Times!* However did you do it?"

The children crowded around, congratulating him. "Gosh, Dad, that's really something. Did that knocking come right with the message?"

"Yep," said Fred with justifiable pride, "it's part of the message. Look, Mavis," he waved his hand up and down the street. In both directions, as far as they could see, families were clustered around their front doors, listening to New York *Timeses.*

When it was over, the nearer neighbors shouted, "That your idea, Fred?"

"'Fraid I'll have to admit it is," Fred called back, laughing.

From all sides came cries of "Great work, Fred," and "Swell stuff, Fred," and "Say, you sure are on the ball, Fred." Probably only he and Mavis, though, fully realized what it was going to mean in terms of promotion.

Unnoticed, Grandmother had gone into the house, into her room, and extracted a small box from one of her suitcases. Now she came out of the house again and crossed to the family group on the lawn.

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"While you're out here where we can talk, I've something to tell you. It might be better if you sent the children into the house."

Mavis asked Kitty if she weren't afraid of missing her new Crunchies commercial, and the children raced inside.

"I can't stand another day of it," Grandmother said. "I'm sorry, but I've got to leave right now."

"Why Grandmother, you can't — you don't even know where you're going!"

"Oh, I do know where I'm going. I'm going back to jail. It's really the only sensible place for me. I have friends there, and it's the quietest place I know."

"But you can't . . ." Fred began.

"But I can," Grandmother replied. She opened her hand and showed them the little box.

"Earplugs! Grandmother! Put them out of sight, quickly. Wherever did you get them?"

Grandmother ignored Mavis' question. "I'm going to telephone the police and ask them to come and get me." She turned and started into the house.

"She can't do that," Fred said wildly.

"Let her go, Fred. She's right, and besides it solves the whole problem."

"But Mavis, if she calls the police here it'll be all over town. I'll be ruined! Stop her and tell her we'll drive her to some other police station!"

Mavis reached her grandmother before Grandmother reached the police, and explained Fred's predicament. A wicked gleam appeared in Grandmother's eye, but it was gone in a second. She looked at Mavis with some tenderness and said all right, just as long as she got back to the penitentiary as quickly as possible.

They all had breakfast. The children, humming the new Crunchies song, marched off to school — they would be told at night that Grandmother had suddenly gone on another "trip" — and Mavis and Fred drove to a town 50 miles away, with Grandmother and her luggage in the back seat. Grandmother was happy and at peace, thinking, as she listened to the gas tanks yelling to be filled up, the spark plugs crying to be cleaned, and all the other parts asking to be checked, or repaired, or replaced, that she was hearing MV for the last time.

But as the Bascoms were driving back home, after depositing Grandmother, it hit Fred all of a sudden. He fairly shouted in his excitement. "Mavis! We've all been blind as bats!"

"How do you mean, dear?"

"Blind, I tell you, blind! I've been thinking about Grandmother in prison, and all the thousands of people in jail and prison, *without MV.*

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They don't buy any products, so they don't get any MV. Can you imagine what that does to their buying habits?"

"Yes, you're right, Fred — five or ten or twenty years without it, they probably wouldn't *have* any buying habits after all that time." She laughed. "But I don't see what you can do about it."

"Plenty, Mavis, and not just about prisons. This is going to revolutionize the Corporation! Do you realize that ever since MV was invented we've just assumed that the discs had to be right with the products? Why? In the name of heaven, why? Take a prison, for instance. Why couldn't we, say, have a little box in each cell where the discs could be kept and that way the prisoners could still hear the MV and it would sort of preserve their buying habits and then when they got out they wouldn't be floundering around?"

"I wonder, Fred, about the prison authorities. You'd have to get their cooperation, I mean they'd have to distribute the discs, wouldn't they?"

Fred was way ahead of her. "We make it a public service, Mavis. Besides the regular MV, we get a few sponsors with vision, some of those big utilities people that like to do good, and they'll be satisfied with just a short plug for their product and then the rest of the message can be for the benefit of the prisoners, like little talks on honesty is the best policy and how we expect them to behave when they get out of jail — things that'll really help prepare them for life on the outside again."

Impulsively, Mavis put her hand on his arm and squeezed it. No wonder she was so proud of her Fred! Who but Fred — Mavis blinked to keep back the tears — who but Fred would think right off, first thing, not just of the money-making side, but of the welfare and betterment of all those poor prisoners!

STOP PRESS BULLETIN!

After this issue had gone to press, we received the following terrifying communication from Ann Griffith:

"I have just returned from a trip to my local supermarket where I discovered that a reasonably exact facsimile of MV has been installed! There was a big stack of jars of prunes, and coming out from its midst, via tape-recording, one of those ghastly cheerful women's voices saying try the new delicious ready-cooked prunes, why don't you pick up a jar right now, etc., etc., etc., over and over and over."

We can only add our voices to the prayer with which Miss Griffith closes her announcement:

GOD HELP US ALL!

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The long stories by Ward Moore which have appeared here have been essentially sober and serious works; but now the bearded Sage of Topanga Canyon lets a lighter note of sardonic humor creep into his (in the word of his own coinage) improbabilia. Here's a brief but barbed commentary on the psychology of actors, the immortality of beauty, and other such concepts characteristic of that highly improbable species, H. sapiens.

Measure of a Man

by WARD MOORE

"But you're in your prime, Kip; in the pink. You've got years yet. Years. You've no business thinking about death at your time of life."

Kipling Farker smirked at himself in the mirror as he tied his hand-painted, made-to-order cravat. That is, he started to smirk, then quickly parted his lips in the famous Farker smile — boyish yet dignified — to show his even, fine teeth. "Of course I am, Cliff, of course I am. But I'm not thinking of death. I'm thinking of what comes after. Long after. That's why I want to attend to everything now, when I have plenty of time to do it right."

"Morbid," muttered Cliff, shaking his head. "Morbid."

Farker twisted sideways and back, giving his tie a final pat. The mirror in front reflected the larger, more ornamental one on the opposite wall, the shaggy white rug and the white fur-covered chairs of his bedroom. The attitude he took showed broad shoulders and narrow hips to the best advantage. He smiled again, touching his cheek gently as though in commendation of the Farker complexion, the Farker dimple, the Farker chin.

"Suppose you were a Gallup pollster; what man in the street — outside of show business, naturally — could tell you who Garrick was? Or Burbage or the Booths? Much less what they looked like. But anybody in 2953 will know all about Kip Farker. How he looked, what he wore —" he glanced down complacently at his shoes, works of art, produced by a bootmaker on a unique last reserved exclusively for Kipling Farker, Esquire, and worthy of the handsomely formed feet they encased, "— the events of his career, the surprising popularity . . ."

"You earned every bit of it, Kip," murmured Cliff.

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"Well . . . I tried. I've never given less than my best. Anyway, they'll know all about me because I have the foresight to preserve myself for them."

He slipped into the tailored jacket, black and yellow plaid. "I swear Poppler is getting careless; this is a full half inch too wide in the shoulders. Must have thought he was fitting some clerk who needed padding." He turned back to his conversation with Cliff who was his valet, secretary, confidant, friend and butt. "Morbid, you say. Were the pharaohs morbid? Not a bit of it. Just intelligently conscious of the future. Unwilling to rot away like slaves, they saw to it their bodies were preserved. Achieving the only immortality possible. Not that they had anything particularly worth immortalizing. Me, on the other hand — Well, you have to admit there's only one Kip Farker. The Perfect. It's only reasonable to preserve me for the future. Like Lenneen."

"Well," said Cliff doubtfully. "When you put it that way . . ."

"I put it that way because it's the only way. By rights the government ought to do it, or the Guild, or even any of the committees who got all the publicity from finding out I was the only perfect specimen of humanity ever measured. But they haven't enough national pride or interest in art. So I'll have to do it myself."

"Everything's always fallen on your shoulders, Kip."

Farker became brisk. "Well, there's the casket people. I understand they can make them to last practically forever and keep the — uh — contents from the slightest contact with the air. Give them my measurements. Five foot, eleven and an eighth — but you know all that. Have to have additional space for microfilm, projector, phonograph and records. Better have windup machines — who knows what kind of power they'll have a thousand years from now."

"You never miss a bet, Kip. Don't know how you do it."

Farker beamed and walked buoyantly into the adjoining study, followed by Cliff. The low bookcases were full of bronze, nickel, and silver trophies, all proclaiming the peculiar excellence of Kipling Farker's physique. There was even one for acting ability in a supporting role. He looked thoughtfully at the full-length heroic portrait of himself as Apollo.

"I wasn't satisfied to be born perfect. That was an accident. Always been a challenge to me. 'Kip,' I used to say to myself, 'it's a challenge. The accident of perfection gave you your chance; you've got to exercise your talents to use it.' "

"You're so right. And you certainly did."

"It's been an uphill fight. Jealousy on all sides. Anemic producers and consumptive critics. Trying to belittle. But my public stood by me."

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"They love you Kip — and with reason."

Farker returned to business. "Then there's the embalmer. I want the best. No cheap job to last twenty or 30 years. I want the most scientific work they can do. Get their price and promise them 10 per cent over. It'll all be in the will, explain. And get some professor, a guy that's specialized in Egyptology, to check on the work. Pick a young fellow — or better yet, make a deal with the university. Because everyone on the faculty will check out before I do. You know these round-shouldered, pot-bellied braintrusters."

"You bet. You're good for a long time yet, Kip."

"I take care of myself. Always have. My body is a sort of sacred trust to me."

"And rightly so," said Cliff. "And rightly so."

"Now let's see what we've got. Casket maker, embalmer, phonograph, records, microfilm, projector. A print of every film I've appeared in — or rather, just my scenes; save space — and reduce them. Come to think of it, better edit out the rest of the cast too — no point. Have all my clippings filmed, and the stills. And the publicity releases — especially those good ones the columnists were too petty to use. Have them translated — Spanish, say, and Russian — can't tell what language they'll speak then."

"You think of everything, Kip."

"I'll probably think of plenty more. I've got lots of time."

"You can say that again."

"But in a deal like this there's nothing like looking ahead. Now let's go over what we've got so far. Casket-maker, embalmer . . ."

Fadeout, as they say, and fadein. But not to 2953. Because although Kipling Farker's will was carried out to the last detail after he succumbed to pneumonia in 1966 ("I thought the louse was going to pull through after all," complained Cliff, "and I'd have to wait forever to get those few miserable bucks he left me") and time-capsules were planted in enough places telling where and when he was to be dug up for the delectation of posterity, certain unforeseen events interfered.

For one thing, there was a war. A very big and important war, with all the most advanced and improved devices, and though Kipling Farker would never have admitted the right of any war to detract attention from his mummy, it did. Principally by burying his mausoleum under several hundred feet of what had once been a city.

The rubble pile, which contained a considerable number of other bodies, unembalmed and even unassembled, remained undisturbed for a long

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time. Centuries. Millennia. An occasional earthquake shook it up a little. A climatic change occurred, the polar icecap enlarged, that part of the world sank under the ocean. Fishes swam, dolphin sported, porpoises splashed over the airtight, watertight casket embedded in concrete, housed in a tomb, covered with crumbled masonry and the detritus of the sea bottom.

A geologic age passed. A tiny tribe, descendants of two Alaskan Eskimos, having slowly retreated southward before the advancing glaciers, merged quite peaceably with the posterity of some Negro miners from northern Alabama. Remote sons of the survivors in Guatemalan jungles or Andean plateaus ventured cautiously forth into a world legendarily populated by murderous devils. Adventurous issue of the Ainu, the Papuans, Bantu, Andorrans, Lapps, Falkland Islanders, Pitcairners, and heirs of a couple who had been exploring Antarctica at the moment of catastrophe, met and mated on the sterile, rubbish-strewn deserts of what had been London, New York and Moscow.

These progeny of backward people never learned to kill. They seemed incapable of disliking those who came from a different place or covered their mouths with their hands instead of belching in loud politeness as more sophisticated individuals did. Pigmentation, eye-shape, anthropometric measurements carried no moral weight with them. They built a civilization of a sort, resting on notions of equality, mutual helpfulness, non-violence, and humbleness. Aggressiveness, vanity, selfishness, simply were not bred into them. They survived, but without glory.

Perhaps because there were no wars to kill off the tallest, or perhaps because they used the earth wisely, they grew larger, sturdier, more handsome. Giants they were, by 1953 standards, but without the notion that height and virtue, or beauty and superiority, were synonymous. An average tallness of seven and a half feet was merely a statistic to them rather than a physical recognition of nobility.

So fadein this new epoch, the Quinary, and the Rak Archeological Expedition. The expedition was headed by Professor Doctor Ta Rak, with a string of runes after his name indicating great learning and conformity. Dr. Rak was not optimistic; the tumulus designated for excavation was located in an area which had been ocean a few thousand years earlier, and the professor didn't hold with the heretical theorists who asserted humans had lived in preglacial times. He had written four books proving the theory was based entirely on dim legends which were obviously poetry rather than science. In his opinion the rubble, in spite of its appearance, was undoubtedly an odd natural phenomenon.

Still, he was supposed to dig; that was an archeologist's job, so he dug.

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With machines. Very sensitive ones which could move tons of stone without scratching them. With half his mind and all his interest on his next venture — so much more promising — Dr. Rak conscientiously directed his men and machines.

It was in the second year of the expedition that one of the great shovels brought up the block of concrete. Deposited gently on the ground, its fairly regular shape made Hu Zos, who was young and enthusiastic, with no runes after his name and an unacademic habit of believing what he saw rather than what he had been taught, exclaim, "I'd swear it was an artifact!"

"Absurd!" snorted Ta Rak, instantaneously recalling references from seven learned works to support his contention. "An ordinary composite boulder, probably of glacial origin."

Hu Zos, his amber skin moving smoothly over his muscles, walked around the block, studying it carefully. "Please, Professor, could I have permission to open it?"

Ta Rak, who was three times his age, but just as muscular and unwrinkled, looked at him coldly. "You disagree with me?"

"Oh, no sir. It's just — well, I have a hunch."

Ta Rak smiled sourly. "Very well. If you must play, you must. Go ahead."

While he pretended to be uninterested in their activity, Hu Zos and a gang of workers chattered drills on the concrete. At two feet they came upon the lead envelope of the casket; from then on they merely chipped the outside away. Hu Zos tried to hide his elation.

But Ta Rak knew nothing of the importance of individual achievement. It never occurred to him to envy his pupil's triumph. Now as eager himself, he took up a pneumatic chisel and worked away until the entire upper half of the coffin was exposed. They cut through the lead and stripped it off. They found the sealed edges and broke into them. Excitedly they pried off the lid and revealed the mummy of Kipling Farker, lifelike as the day he had gasped his last, thousands of dim years before.

"Oh," exclaimed Hu Zos. "Magnificent!"

"Marvelous," agreed Dr. Rak. "Incredible!"

They shook hands. They patted each other on the back. They looked at the mummy and shook hands again. "Unbelievable," said Ta Rak.

"The chances of coming on such a beauty," began Hu Zos, backing a little in awe and then coming forward again immediately in enthusiasm, "must be . . ."

"Infinitesmal," finished the professor. "Why, even the probability of finding a skeleton or a single bone is fantastically unlikely. And here — thanks to your hunch — we have everything. Simply everything."

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For perhaps twenty minutes they gazed, completely bemused, at Kipling Farker with a pure delight which would have compensated him for all the trouble he had taken to have himself so carefully hoarded. It was of just such a moment as this that he had allowed himself to dream.

Finally Ta Rak said, not at all unhappily, "I shall have to revise my theories completely. There were men in preglacial times after all, and the ancient legends do not lie."

"It is a man then?" asked Hu Zos.

"I didn't say that," replied the professor. "Evidence of its humanity has not yet been established. However it seems indicated that it was buried by men."

"You don't think it is a representative specimen of our ancestors?"

Ta Rak shook his head. "Most unlikely. Note the divergences which appear to rule out the possibilities of either direct or collateral descent."

"The skin color — isn't it amazing? Red and gray blotches."

"Let us remove the wrappings carefully — they are almost as precious as the body."

"The limbs are ghastly pale; a troglodyte perhaps, Dr. Rak? Always shielded from the sun?"

Ta Rak grunted. "Observe the gnarled feet; the knotty muscles, the strange formation of the chest and abdomen."

"The cranial structure," Hu Zos took up the refrain. "The prognathic index, the rudimentary forehead."

"Amazing," stated the professor.

"Unique," agreed the pupil.

"Perfect," added Ta Rak. "And we have these as well." He pointed to the closely packed boxes at Farker's feet.

The mechanism of the phonograph and projector seemed simple to them; they quickly exhausted all Kipling Farker's legacy. The runes on the microfilm were beyond their deciphering; they left them for the specialists, certain they would be read in time. The pictures were a different matter; it needed no expertness for understanding and interpreting the posturings and struttings of Kip Farker in a hundred different attitudes. The cutting had been done thoroughly and well: Farker was always alone on the film; no other figure competed with him. He gestured at nothingness, he spoke into emptiness.

"Well," said Dr. Rak contentedly, after they had run through the material twice. "These certainly tell us a lot. I believe we can now safely say that our specimen is a man — of sorts. And from a very primitive society."

"I'm not quite sure I follow you," said Hu Zos respectfully.

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"A very primitive society," repeated the professor in his best classroom manner. "For what have we here? Fetishes. Objects of worship in a superstitious cult. Animism. Carefully preserved with extraordinary veneration. We know from —" here Dr. Rak went rapidly through the names of the most profound archeological scholars — "that primitive societies customarily revered their madmen, their sports, their freaks. Is it not only logical that great pains should be taken to care for these sacred freaks, even after death?"

"Oh yes, sir," said Hu Zos, deeply impressed.

"Well then," concluded Dr. Rak, half triumphant scholar, half deeply pitying man. "A primitive people and only a primitive people would have preserved so elaborately and lovingly the remains of this poor, stunted dwarf."

Coming . . . *in our next issue (on the stands in early July) . . .*

TIME IS A TRAITOR — another of Alfred Bester's powerful studies in the *why?*'s of future murder;

ONE MAN'S MEAT — a new Gavagan's Bar story by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt;

plus . . .
the return of Richard Sale's wondrous and baffled policeman, Captain McGrail;

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stories by Alan Nelson, David Grinnell, Philip K. Dick, and others —

All in addition to the first part of an exciting new two-part serial, THREE HEARTS AND THREE LIONS, by Poul Anderson (see p. 2).

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We are honored and pleased that, at long last, we can bring you a story by one of the greatest of the great writers of fantasy, Lord Dunsany. Like so much Dunsany, this drily ironic tale is not quite what you think it is; there comes a time when it veers sharply away from the humdrum and leaves you stumbling about in the insoluble.

Told Under Oath

by LORD DUNSANY

PEOPLE OFTEN TALK of Satan, but it's very seldom you meet a man who has actually seen him. I was once on my way south from one of the world's greatest lures, the sea, to a lure that to me is even greater, the desert. All the way between lies land that the Arabs think is arable — whatever view an English farmer might take of it — land that becomes more and more inhospitable to man and his crops until, through a narrow pass in a wall of mountains, you come suddenly on the blue calm of the Sahara. I was in a car going southward from Algiers, and the ages seemed to be queerly mixed up, with my hired motor passing camels among marble fragments of the Roman empire, fallen in ruin where Rome had ruined Carthage.

Toward evening we stopped for tea, my chauffeur and I, at a French *estaminet* in a little village, and it was there that I met the man who had seen Satan. The room in the inn was small, and he sat at the next table to mine. I did not guess his nationality, for the French colonials and the Arabs are equally brown under that sun. I thought at first that he was an Arab, because he had a certain far look in his eyes that they have; but he turned out to be an Englishman. He surprised me when I asked him if he knew how far it was to El Kantara, below whose crags I intended to spend the second night of my journey, and he answered in perfect English. Then I saw that the look in his eyes that had made me think him an Arab, whose eyes can see so clearly over the desert and discern their paradise as clearly beyond it, came not from gazing where the Arabs gazed, but from some strange story he had. Of this I somehow felt sure. And strange it certainly was. I determined to get it, but how I was going to do so I didn't know.

I asked him if he could tell me the distance to El Kantara, and he told me. After a short conversation he asked me if I would give him a lift in

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my car for the five or six kilometers to his house. This of course I agreed to and off we started on our silent drive. All during the journey he seemed to sit brooding over that story of his, as though he had something to tell which he never thought of sharing with any chance acquaintance, if with anybody at all. The brief twilight was fading over those barren lands and, when the careless driver nearly ran over a dog, I blurted out, "The devil!" My silent companion winced, a slight wince but unmistakable, a little key to the mystery of his past, what may be called a clue, by those whose business it is to work out clues. But a clue to what? Not surely to any actual association with Satan. That was a wild guess. But I had only guesses to guide me; nor did it seem so wild, as it would here, in that strange land with night coming down on the waste. After that wince he dropped back again into his impassivity, and his gaze was still far from me.

All men must be mysterious to one who has only just met them, but about this man there seemed some especial mystery, and I determined to trace it. Having nothing to guide me but that strange guess that had come to me in the twilight, I could only trust to it as though it were accurate evidence. If that were wrong I had no clue at all, so I treated my guess as though it were right. "It's queer how often we mention the devil," I said, "as I did just now. But very few men have ever seen him."

"Very few," said my companion.

"In fact nobody ever has," I went on.

"Perhaps not," he answered.

I laughed at that. A laugh directed toward the story a man won't tell will more often draw it forth than argument will. He sat perfectly silent in the dying twilight as our car purred down the road and began to meet beetles droning by, and I sat silent too. Then he said, "I have seen him."

"That," I said at once, "is most interesting."

"I don't think that is the word for it," he replied.

"But it is," I said, and waited for him to go on. But I got no more. We sat in dead silence but for the sound of the car. And then I told him, "I write articles sometimes about the fauna of different countries, and I feel sure it would interest such readers as I have if you would tell me what the devil was like."

"I doubt it," he said.

"But I am sure it would, if it were true," I answered.

"It's true enough," he said.

"Then I know it would interest them," I insisted. "Things that are true always do."

He was silent again, but not now, as I could somehow see even in that dim light, from determination not to tell me what I was so curious to hear.

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He had rather the air of a man who was turning back to old thoughts. While he seemed to think, I added, "I only want what is true. If you really have seen the devil, I know it would interest my readers."

"Satan," he said. "Satan is what he is called, you know."

"Well, Satan," I said.

"I can tell your readers one thing," he said then, "and that is that they'll never get anything from him."

That, I explained, was not quite what I wanted. Any readers that I may have do not require moral lessons from me. But anything true, anything that has really happened in this wide world of which we know so little, would probably be of interest. He was silent again for a while, as silent as the calm of the evening. A beetle hit the wind-screen and exploded, and this seemed to disturb his reverie. "I will tell you," he said.

"That would be very kind of you," I replied. "I know that your story will be interesting, if it is really true. I only mention that because so many people have written stories of Satan. But I don't want fiction. My readers have had enough of that."

"It is perfectly true," he answered.

"I only write about fauna that have been actually seen," I repeated. "Will you give me a solemn assurance that your story of Satan will be the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"I will give you my oath," he said.

I got out my notebook and pencil. "Then I should like to give your story, if I may, to my readers."

"Certainly," he said. And he swore a most solemn oath.

"Well, that," I said, "is good enough for me, and should be for them."

"They have my oath," he answered.

"Quite so," I said. "That is all I want for them."

"I met him at a cocktail party," he said.

"Who?" I asked.

"Satan," he said.

"How was he dressed?" I asked.

"Like everybody else," he said. "He looked quite ordinary. In fact I should never have recognized him if it hadn't been that I was not drinking any cocktails, which seemed in some odd way to be disappointing him. He sidled up to me without any introduction. It was what he said that told me he was the devil."

"What did he say?" I asked.

"He said, 'Is there anything that you want?' " replied my companion.

"I've often heard people say that," I told him.

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"It was the way he said *anything* that told me, and the way his eyes looked at the time, a wide and faraway look. I saw that he meant *anything*."

"Anything?" I repeated.

"Anything at all," he replied.

"And what did you ask?" I said.

"We stop here," he called out.

We were before a square house with white walls and a flat roof, a little way back from the road, and behind the house was what looked like a poultry yard, guarded also by four white walls, high as those of the house. I naturally thought that he would ask me in; but he did not. The driver, seeing we wished to talk, lighted a cigarette and strolled away from the car, till he was one of many dim forms with shapes of rocks and of bushes that Earth was gathering slowly into one dusk. Then my companion told me his name, which I have not yet told my readers, partly because I cannot be sure that it really was his name. Kelston, he said it was. "Are you married?" I asked.

"To some extent," he replied.

And from that I gathered that his wives were Arabs and lived in the Arab way and would not expect a visitor at that hour, or at any time. So we sat and spoke in the car.

"I should explain," he said, "that I had been persuaded to join a club out in the country in very pleasant surroundings. But it was a golf club, and golf was not a game at which I was particularly proficient. In fact I wasn't any good at it at all. But I felt that I had to play, and that was where the trouble began. I felt that the other members were laughing at me. Funny what trifles start men on what courses. They didn't even laugh openly; and, if I hadn't felt that they were doing it, I should never have asked what I did of the devil. My golf was bad. I told you that. But they needn't have laughed at me. And I don't think I am wrong in saying they did so.

"Well, when I was asked that extraordinary question and looked into the fellow's eyes and saw who he was, I said to myself, 'Now it's my turn to laugh.' And what I asked was to be able to go once around that golf course, doing every hole in one. They could laugh at that if they wanted to, and then go round the course and see what they could do themselves. Bogey was 94, but we would see what Satan could do. 'But certainly,' he said, the moment I made my request. Then he vanished, or left the party, I can't say which; and I was left with my odd power.

"For I had it; it worked. Only one round, of course; that was all I had asked. And it was all I wanted. They have an annual competition at that club for a prize of £100, and I knew it was coming on soon. I entered for it, and the secretary smiled; but he took my name and my fee, which was £5.

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"There is not much more to tell. I was going round with one of their best players. I should explain that we all went round once, unless there was a tie, and the one who did best took the £100. I did the first hole in one. There were cheers, shouting, and good-natured laughter; because of course my doing that was really very funny to them, knowing nothing about Satan. They sent back to the clubhouse for a bottle of champagne for me. That is a custom of our club when a hole is done in one. But it doesn't often happen. They insisted on my drinking a glass of it when it came, which would not have been very good for my golf in the ordinary way. But they made my opponent drink one too, as well as my caddy, which might have evened it up, had it been ordinary golf. But I had the devil on my side, and of course I did the next hole in one also. That produced sheer astonishment; the worst player in the club doing that twice. After a while they just said, 'Well, there it is. He has done it.' By which they meant that it was a fact that they had to accept, however unlikely it seemed; and they offered me another bottle of champagne. We were farther from the clubhouse now, and I was able to persuade them to leave that to the end of the round, and they said they would. At the third hole nothing was said. And after that the whole crowd dropped off, and no single onlooker but my caddy saw me do the fourth hole in one, nor the fifth, nor any of the rest. Needless to say, I did all the rest in one; you can't beat Satan. There was nothing to prevent my opponent from seeing it if he had taken the trouble to look, but he seemed to have lost all interest.

"Then you won," I said.

"Of course," he replied.

"But I thought you said," I rejoined, "that you never got anything from Satan."

"You shall hear," he said. "I had a nice house with a lawn in front of it and a garden behind, and I lived in a decent country. I got this from him instead: these bare white walls and this godforsaken country."

"But how?" I asked.

"I was going to tell you," he said. "I won the tournament, as I told you, and came back to the clubhouse. Nobody spoke. The committee had a meeting. I don't know what they said. I had tea by myself at a table. I didn't see any more bottles of champagne. And then a servant came to me and said that the secretary wished to see me. 'What about?' I asked. The servant did not know: the secretary wished to see me. Well, I went to the secretary's office and found him sitting at his desk. As he sat there quite silent, I said, 'Well, I won the tournament.'

"And all he said was, 'Yes.' Nothing more.

" 'You wanted to see me,' I said after a bit.

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" 'Yes,' he said again.

" 'May I ask what about?'

" 'I wanted to stress,' said he, 'that this is a gentleman's club.'

" 'Is that all you wanted to say?' I asked.

" 'Yes,' he said, 'that it is a club for gentlemen.'

" 'I see,' I said.

" 'The £100 will be paid you,' said the secretary. 'But after that it is the wish of the committee that you should resign from the club.'

" 'You think I made the score by unfair means,' I said.

" 'I think nothing,' he answered. 'I have only stated that it is a club for gentlemen. The £100 will be paid you.'

" 'If you had any doubts you could have watched me,' I said.

" 'We don't do that here,' he replied.

"He then gave me the check, but I would have been better off if he hadn't. It made my crime worse. Nobody believed that I hadn't cheated. The story spread and I was regarded everywhere as a man who had stolen £100. That is to say, I was so regarded at first. But as time went on there is no doubt that the rumored sum grew larger, and I have strong grounds for believing that before the end of the year it was generally credited by all the people I knew, and by how many that I did not know there is no saying, that I had cheated that golf club out of £1000. Some even said that I had done it at cards. Not that that should really have made it any worse; but it seemed worse to those that believed it. And, mind you, I couldn't go up to anyone and say, 'I never cheated at cards.' That announcement would only have made matters still worse.

"I welcomed the sight of strangers, for it was only they who, when we passed in the street, did not look away from me at their watches, or at shop-windows on the opposite side from the one by which I approached. Had there been a legal charge, the thing would have come to some head. But there was none; only that glacial air frozen on all faces, as though everyone that I knew were on some vast jury that had found me guilty. And as there had been no sentence, there could be no appeal.

"Things were like this for weeks. Not even the boldest explorers stay at the North Pole forever; and I who have felt it can tell you that spiritual chill, combined with a sense of injustice, can be worse than anything that the thermometer can record. So out of this spiritual frost I pulled up my tent pegs and, with that sense of injustice of which I spoke urging me like a strong north wind, I went south till I came where no one could have heard of my expulsion from that golf club or would have cared if they had."

"And I may tell my readers," I said, "that your story is perfectly true?"

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"Haven't I sworn to you?" he replied. "Do you know any solemner oath than the one that I swore by?"

"No," I admitted.

"After all," he said, "I am an English gentleman, even if they did turn me out of their golf club."

"Oh, certainly," I assured him, for I could see that he was. "And I will assure my readers of that when I tell your story. But I haven't got it all yet. I have only half. The devil's half. May I ask what about your half?"

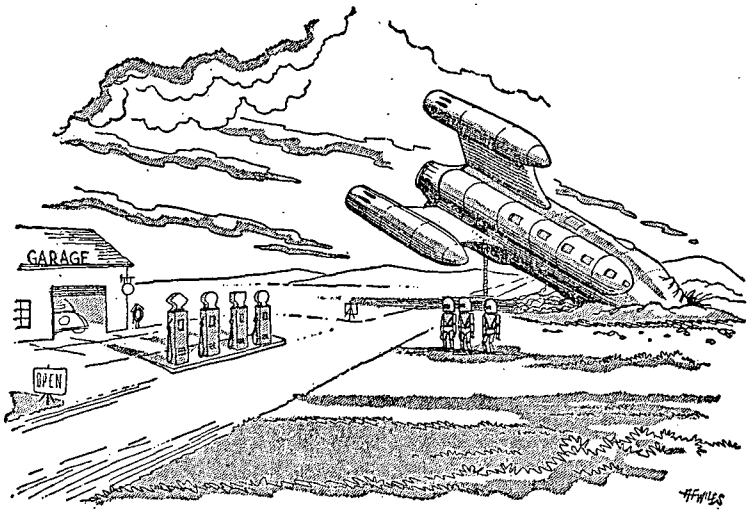
"What do you call my half?" he asked.

"The devil gave you that wonderful round of golf," I said. "What did you give him for it? He always demands his more-than-fair price, as far as I've ever read. You didn't let him have your immortal soul in exchange?"

"No, no! Certainly not," he replied. "I am not such a fool as that. I wouldn't give up that for a round of golf."

"Then what?" I asked.

"He extorted from me," said Kelston, "my power of ever speaking the truth again."



"Why don't they move or say something?"

Reproduced from PUNCH, September 24 1952

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Once again Ralph Robin has given us a story to which any sort of introduction is impossible. His waggish mind veers so sharply in such unexpected directions that a bemused editor usually can offer no comment whatsoever without revealing its final stopping-place. So, all we can say here is that he points a moral: have no traffic with neighbors that don't mix a properly dry *martini.*

Open Ears

by RALPH ROBIN

Louis Maxwell never understood how he got so friendly with the Reids. Actually, he rather disliked them; but just the same he found himself at their house five or six times a month. The trouble may have been that he didn't have a wife to think up good excuses for him. Not that excuses necessarily deflected the Reids from their aggressive hospitality.

For example, this time he had told Art Reid truthfully that his car was in the shop — and Art had immediately insisted on calling for him in his own car. So here he was again drinking Martinis — which Gilda always mixed, and mixed too sweet — and listening to the latest damned nonsense they had picked up somewhere.

The Reids believed them all. The one about the Russian submarine (the Government had hushed it up of course) found submerged in San Francisco Bay. All the Russians were dead, and when our Navy people went through the dead officers' pockets they found stubs from a theater in San Francisco dated the day before. This had to be true because a salesman from Art's own company back from the West Coast had heard about it from a Navy officer who had seen the ticket stubs with his own eyes.

Then there was the one about the leper working for the cigarette company. The Reids had changed their brand, even though Louis had patiently explained to them that this same weary old leper must have retired on Social Security many years before. Also the one about the movie theater Gilda wouldn't go to any more because you got jabbed in the arm in the rest room and spirited away into white slavery. And the one about the dead man in the subway, except in the Reid version it was a bus. And there was a remarkably silly story about the Waldorf, being a thing which

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had positively happened to two cousins of a woman Gilda played bridge with.

This was the one (for God's sake) about going to New York on a vacation and splurging by eating lunch at the Waldorf and sending the waiter to get the recipe for the marvelous dessert. The chef sent the recipe out in an envelope, and the girls were grateful — until two weeks later they got a bill from the Waldorf for $100! And they had to pay it! (Never mind how the Waldorf knew their address and why they had to pay the bill and the general improbability of the Waldorf-Astoria's being in the $100-recipe business and the coincidence that the same thing had happened to 7,000,000 girl friends of roommates, roommates of beauty operators, beauty operators of cousins, and cousins of bridge players.)

What was it this time? Louis sipped his too-sweet Martini.

"They're hushing it up, but —" That was traditional, like, "Once upon a time —"

Louis tried not to look bored. Watching Art Reid's foolish red mustache move up and down, he wondered how much foolishness must have passed under it during the man's 45 years or so of life.

"They always hush things up." Louis hadn't meant to say it aloud. He caught himself as he was about to wonder aloud why they never hushed things down. He had drunk too many of those damned Martinis of Gilda's.

"You can say that again. Man's got to keep his ears open to know what's going on. Well, as I was saying, they're hushing this up, but all over the country people are disappearing."

"You mean just going into the air like a bowl of goldfish in a magician's act?"

"Sometimes I don't think you give me any credit for having any sense, Lou. Nothing silly like that. What happens is a fellow walks into a store and the clerk gets him interested in some weird music and all of a sudden when he least expects it somebody throws a cloth bag over his head and they tie up his feet and trip him and before he can make a move in his own defense he's lying there completely helpless and he's never seen again."

"I'm glad you told me. I wasn't on my guard at all last week when a clerk was showing me a new album of Stravinsky. But there's at least one thing that puzzles me. If these victims are never seen again, how did all the details of their terrible fate get out?"

"You don't suppose you can keep a thing like that hushed up forever?" Gilda said.

"I don't see why we shouldn't tell him," Art said. "As a matter of fact we got the information personally from a funny old guy we met in a taproom."

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"Sounds like a reliable informant. Did he by any chance give you an idea of what happens to these fellows who get tied up in bags and are never seen again?"

"Sure. They're sold to some characters that live on a star a couple of hundred lighthouses away."

"You've got it a little wrong, dear," Gilda said. "Not a star. A planet. Not lighthouses. Light-years."

"Yeah, you're right, Gilda. Anyway these characters are doing some scientific experiments — what was that other word, Gilda?"

"I didn't get that exactly. It sounded like those orange-drink places."

"Could it have been genetics?" Louis asked.

"Yeah, that's it," Art said. "Genetics. The old guy explained what it is, too. They even got it on earth. Crossing big peas with little peas and boy fruitflies with girl fruitflies. Interesting as hell. Anyway that's the sort of thing they want these fellows for."

"Women too, I'd imagine."

"Oh, women are disappearing too," Gilda said. She filled Louis's glass from the silver shaker. Gilda always mixed her undry Martinis in large batches, if she didn't actually buy the stuff ready-made and put sugar in it.

It was alcoholic at least. Louis drank, smiled politely, and asked, "How do these characters that live on the planet take their victims away? In flying saucers?"

"Of course not," Art said. "I thought everybody knew by this time that the flying saucers are our own spaceships that we use to get stuff from the moon for making secret weapons. But you know, I never thought to ask the guy how they take the victims away."

"I imagine they use an ordinary spaceship," Gilda said.

"I'd think so," Art said.

Louis couldn't stand it any more. He burst, "What's the matter with you people? How can you believe these things? Haven't I proved a dozen times how idiotic these stories of yours are?"

Art's red mustache stiffened as if he were getting ready to bark, but Gilda looked at him hostess-to-host and he said like a reasonable man, "Well, Lou, that's putting it pretty strong and comes mighty close to calling us idiots, which is all right from an old friend. But as to proving anything, you've only given one man's opinion. You've said that they're all old stories and are supposed to have happened everywhere else too and have been going around in different versions for a long time and don't make any sense anyway. But couldn't the same thing happen all over the place, like the people disappearing, or couldn't different people get the same facts a little bit mixed up? And anyway nothing ever makes sense nowadays when you

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come to think about it. No, I wouldn't say that you've ever proved anything."

"What would you regard as proof?"

"Getting somebody to admit he made it up, like our salesman who told me about the Russian submarine, though he's a very truthful guy, or the Navy officer who told him, though Navy officers never lie. It has something to do with Annapolis. Besides, the salesman's back on the West Coast and I suppose the Navy officer's at sea."

"In that case let's concentrate on the new one about the people they put in cloth bags. Do you know where you might find the funny old guy you and Gilda were talking to in the taproom?"

"You mean right now?" Art said.

"Say, you two!" Gilda said. "Dinner's almost cooked. You can't run away now."

"This is more important than food," Art said solemnly. "I know where we can find him. He'd still be working." Art emptied his glass and got to his feet.

Louis hadn't quite meant to look for the old liar right now, but he decided that this was as good a time as any to teach Art Reid a lesson. Louis stood up competently.

"If you're really going, I'm going with you," Gilda said. "I'll turn off the oven. I don't know why some scientist doesn't fix stoves so they can run backwards and make food raw again if you decide not to eat it."

"The food companies would keep it off the market like the gasoline companies did to the pill you can put in water so it will run a car," Art said.

Gilda ran to the kitchen and back and took a coat out of the closet and said, "Let's go."

"How's that for a woman getting ready?" Art said proudly. "I'll match my wife for speed against any wife in the county. Marriage is a great thing, pal. Man wasn't meant to live without a helpmate."

"I feel sorry for you so often, Lou," Gilda said. "A lonely old bachelor."

Not lonely enough, Louis thought. He made up his mind to refuse firmly another invitation of the Reids. The next time, if there would be a next time, Gilda would be pushing one of those husband-hunting relatives at him.

They all rode cosily in the front seat, which annoyed Louis. He disliked being crowded. He also disliked Art's driving, which was something Art did with the brakes and the horn. Louis thought about how foolish it was to be in this car with these people on this errand. He thought how nice it would

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be not to know the Reids any more. He thought how hungry he was beginning to get. You could say for Gilda she was a pretty good cook, and he was sorry they hadn't eaten dinner before they started out.

Art scared a citizen, called him a name, and turned right from a left lane. They entered one of those neighborhoods that have about half become commercial; where many of the houses have been built out to the street to make store rooms, and where behind one window families are eating supper or watching television and behind another men are working under fluorescent lights.

Art suddenly braked the car and backed into a space behind a truck. "It's across the street," he said. "The old guy runs a paint store."

Gilda gaily hooked arms with both men. "This is fun," she said, and they crossed the street.

A smiling old gentleman in a freshly pressed alpaca coat stopped stacking quart cans on a shelf. Louis liked his round face and his round bald head. The old gentleman said: "You caught me just in time. I was going to close up in about five minutes. What can I do for you folks?"

"We don't want any paint, pal. We use good paint. Ha ha. Listen, pal, we just came to check on something."

"Oh yes. I remember you now. You're Art and Gilda I met in the Tiptop Grill."

"Right. Listen, here's the pitch. This guy, my friend here, doesn't believe that people are being kidnaped by characters from a star somewhere for scientific experiments."

"Well, my goodness. Who does?"

"Now look here. You told us the other night —"

"I'm liable to say anything when I've had seven whiskey sours." His face was crinkled as cheerfully as an old man's face on a pseudo-English Christmas card.

Louis wasn't given to familiar gestures, but now he slapped Art Reid on the back and squeezed Gilda's arm. He felt kindly toward them, after all. "See?" he said. "I hope I haven't hurt anybody's feelings, but I wanted to show you how silly these stories are."

"Wait a minute," Art said. "He hasn't admitted he made it up. He could have got it from somebody else and it could still be true, no matter what he thinks."

"Well, Mr. . . . uh . . . ?" Louis smiled at the smiling old man.

"Barber is the name, sir. Fred Barber. It's a shortened form of Barbarossa. As a matter of fact, I'm descended from Frederick Barbarossa, the Holy Roman Emperor."

He doesn't do so badly without whiskey sours, Louis said to himself.

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"Well, Mr. Barber, if you don't mind our asking, did you invent the story yourself or did you get it from somebody else?"

"I made it up out of the whole cloth. I wanted to see if I could start the rumor going. But I've lost interest. As a matter of fact, I've developed a new interest in life."

Louis looked at the silent Reids. He didn't want to rub it in, so he turned to Mr. Barber and took up his last remark. "What's the new interest, Mr. Barber?" Louis had an idea it would be worth hearing.

"A distinguished lawyer I know has taught me a new skill. He's as bald as I am, and he showed me that by rapping his head with his knuckles he could produce recognizable tones, and he taught me to do it."

"Really?"

"Yes. The trick is to open your mouth more or less, according to what note you want. Like this. Now listen carefully and you'll see that I'm almost as good as a trained seal with a xylophone."

Mr. Fred Barber, descendant of the Holy Roman Emperor, rapped his bald head with his knuckles while his mouth opened and closed like a fish's. Straining his ears Louis actually could recognize the bars of, "My country 'tis of thee sweet land of liberty of thee I sing. . . ."

At "sing" a cloth bag dropped over Louis's head and arms. Someone tied his feet together before he thought to kick, and he was tripped and his hands were tied behind him. He started to yell but tape was wound around his face, pressing the rough cotton of the bag into his mouth He was sure he was going to suffocate, but someone thought of that and snipped out a little piece of the cloth beside his nose. He lay on the floor feeling unpleasantly like a bag of feed.

He heard Mr. Barber say, "You folks are getting quite expert. $100, $200, $300, $400, $500."

"Right," Art said. "Thanks."

"It isn't as though they were going to hurt him," Gilda said, "and I'm sure those scientists will find him a nice wife."

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Here is a heartwarming encounter with a knickerbockered little ghost of good will whose gay haunting vanquishes completely the evil of human greed and despair.

Randall

by LAVINIA R DAVIS

JOHN STETSON'S first morning as headmaster of St. Thomas' School was so discouraging that by early afternoon he was upset by nothing more formidable than an unopened letter in a vaguely familiar handwriting. He tore open the envelope, and as he read, his vague sense of foreboding hardened into downright misery. The writer was Henry Thacher, a former college classmate, who two years earlier had been appointed to the headship of a school for boys which was quite as well known and better endowed than St. Thomas'. Thacher had begun his work with an enthusiasm and ideals which were very like Stetson's own, and within a year a reactionary board of trustees had forced his resignation. Since then he had been out of work and now he wrote asking for a character reference.

Stetson's big, sunburned hand shook as he put down the letter. He had spent the summer fighting his own board over every innovation he had proposed from student government to higher pay for the staff. Hank was an excellent teacher but Stetson knew with a sickening certainty that there was no chance on earth of the trustees accepting him at St. Thomas' in any capacity whatsoever.

He turned to look out of his study window at the clock in the chapel tower. His gray-blue eyes registered the time and the hot brightness of the mica in the fieldstone buildings where he had spent his own happy and successful schooldays but his mind was still on Thacher. He was just turning back to his desk when something moved by the Memorial Fountain next to the chapel, and he saw a boy in wading in the marble basin. The telephone rang, and as Stetson lifted up the receiver, the boy reached out for a pair of long black stockings and old-fashioned button shoes. The next instant, as Stetson recognized Harris, the school doctor's, voice he forgot everything except what the doctor was telling him about Chuck Devons, who had reported to the infirmary a half hour after he had arrived back at school.

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"It can't be that bad," Stetson said finally. "Not hysterical paralysis."

"Of course I'm not certain," Harris said cautiously. "But I told you last spring the boy was a bad risk physically and emotionally."

Stetson's mind snapped back to his interview with Devons a few hours after the boy had let off a stink bomb at the graduation exercises. "Why did you do it, Chuck?" he had asked. "Why?"

The boy's small tear-stained face had looked more hopeless than ever. "I — don't — know."

"Any boy behind it? Any other boy force or dare you into it?"

Devons' chin had lifted and from that moment on Stetson had been his ally. "I did it alone, sir. No one else is in any way to blame."

Harris' worried voice brought Stetson back to the immediate present. "I want to move Devons to the public hospital at once," he said. "If we keep him here seriously ill and with an uncertain diagnosis, rumors will get around that he has everything from polio to beriberi and *then* watch your enrollment."

"Chuck Devons must stay here!" Stetson said and his deep voice hardened. "Good God, man, my parents were dead when I was ten and I know what it feels like not to have any other home but school. Devons' parents are divorced and neither of them wants him."

"That's his funeral and you're trying to make it yours," Harris said, but his voice was friendlier, and after arranging for a consultation with an out-of-town specialist he hung up.

A moment later Stetson pushed back his chair and started over to the infirmary. Harris meant well but he didn't understand Chuck Devons. The boy was small and insignificant-looking and the fact that he was hopeless at athletics made him feel completely inadequate. The boy's fundamentally decent, Stetson thought, and he's really keen on chemistry which they wouldn't let him take. Lord, if I could only get Pendergast to take an interest in him.

The idea was neither new nor hopeful. Joel Pendergast, head of the science department, not only detested Devons but bitterly resented Stetson's elevation to the headmastership. When Stetson had decided that Devons should be allowed to return to school, and had dug into his own pocket for a partial scholarship, Pendergast had taken the matter as a direct personal insult.

I'll have to make time to teach Chuck chemistry myself, Stetson decided. If we formed an afternoon chemistry club it might be his salvation.

Tibby Birkett, the school nurse, let him into Devons' room and he tried to tell the boy his plan. "Chuck," he said, "Chuck, can you hear me? I've had a great idea. A chemistry club —"

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The dark lashes quivered and Stetson leaned forward. "Listen, Chuck," he said. "Would you help me start a chemistry club?"

There was no response from the rigid, withdrawn figure on the hospital bed. Stetson tried again and again but it was no use and when Tibby Birkett finally motioned to him to leave he looked older and more stooped than he had ten minutes earlier.

He passed Memorial Fountain on his way home and saw it was empty. The boy I thought I saw wading was probably just a trick of the light, he decided, and hurried back to his study to answer an irate letter he had received from Baits Pendergast, Joel's younger brother, earlier in the week. Baits Pendergast was an alumni member of the board of trustees and he had written to complain of every change both actual and potential which Stetson had made during the summer months. The fact that Baits had not been able to engineer Joel's appointment as head of St. Thomas' explained his bitterness, Stetson decided, and after making due allowance for family loyalty he struggled to answer the letter as kindly and objectively as possible.

At 4 o'clock the letter was still unfinished but Stetson knew it was time for him to go out and make his welcoming address to the new boys who were already assembling on the campus. He put through another call to the infirmary and found that Devons' condition was unchanged. He was just leaving his study when Mollie, his wife, came in the front door.

"It looks like a fine crowd of new boys," Mollie said as he leaned down to kiss her. "I've just been outside gloating on being the headmaster's wife."

Stetson smiled, but he couldn't help seeing that she looked worn after a maidless summer, and that her neatly pressed suit was faded and shabby. Two of the sacrifices that went into Devons' scholarship money, Stetson thought, and then as she reached up and patted his cheek, realized that she was worried about his mouth, which had a way of drooping at the left side when he was seriously overtired. "I'm O.K., darling," he said and gave her a grin which he hoped was not lopsided. "Just worried about Devons. Somehow I can't help feeling that if it hadn't been for the grace of God, my schoolboy years would have been worse spent and more miserable than his."

For a moment Mollie only stared. "You!" she sputtered. "Like Devons? Why you were the school hero. Captain of the baseball team, head prefect, the works!"

"I was good at catching a ball," Stetson said. "Which isn't really as potentially valuable a gift as a flair for chemistry. I was just luckier than Devons."

"You were dearer and better and just plain wonderful," Mollie said as she straightened his necktie. "But now forget Chuck for a while, my darling,

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and go out and really talk to those new boys. After all, Johnny, this is the chance you've always wanted."

Stetson touched the top of her head and went outside feeling as though icicles were cramping the action of his heart. Without meaning to, Mollie had put her finger on the aching core of his newborn self-distrust. "The chance you've always wanted." Well, it had come and with it the sudden and intensely personal revelation of how much easier it was to be on the outside of school policy tearing down than on the inside struggling to build up. It wasn't simply Hank Thacher's lot that was so terrifying, though with Mollie and their two little daughters to provide for that was sobering enough. What shook John Stetson was the thought of Thacher's school, which since his dismissal had relapsed into being nothing more than a spawning ground for snobs and clubmen.

It's the boy that counts, he told himself. The separate, God-created, individual boy. He straightened his shoulders and went off at his usual loose-jointed pace across the lawn to where the new first form was waiting.

The boys stood up as Stetson approached and he found himself facing three dozen pairs of alarmingly identical gray flannel trousers. The boys aren't alike, Stetson consoled himself. It's purely superficial. At that moment he saw a small conspicuous figure in an old-fashioned twill coat, knickerbockers, and of all things a black bowler hat, slither into the front row.

Stetson's mind reeled and then he remembered the boy in the fountain. At the same moment he breathed in the strong, unmistakable reek of moth balls from the boy's absurdly old-fashioned clothes, and knew he was not imagining things. Was it a practical joke? A new way to flout authority? Stetson could not tell, but he realized instantly that the only fair thing to do was to ignore the clothes until his speech was over and he could ascertain all the facts. With a physical effort he focused on nothing but the nearest gray flannels and began to speak.

Somehow he labored through the clear, deceptively simple talk he had worked on for weeks and began to shake hands with each new boy in turn. "I'm another Randall, sir." The child in the archaic clothes was one of the few with enough *savoir faire* to introduce himself before Stetson had to ask or guess his name. "Jimmy Randall."

Stetson smiled down at the rosy chipmunk cheeks above the outrageously stiff collar and saw the delighted friendliness in the dark eyes. "Glad to have you with us, Randall," he said and suddenly felt more cheerful than he had felt all day. "Your family has had a fine record at this school."

"Thank you, sir!" Jimmy Randall beamed as though Stetson's conventional remark had been the most brilliant and original in the world. "I'll do my very best for the school."

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"Good boy," Stetson said and turned to shake hands with the next in line. Randall skipped back into place and Stetson saw out of the corner of his eye that he seemed completely unconcerned over his classmates' noisy reaction to his clothes.

After Stetson's talk, the new boys were due at the gym to meet the football coach and the captain of the school team. As they ran, raced, jumped, and generally showed off on their way across the lawn most of them betrayed nervousness of some sort but not Randall. He sauntered along at a comfortable distance behind the crowd, fanning himself with his ridiculous hat and humming the high, sprightly tune of the *Mulligan Guards.*

Stetson stared at the boy's small, erect back and then wiped his own forehead, just as Bugs Flaherty, the school prefect, came over to join him.

"What is the idea?" Stetson demanded. "When I first saw those clothes I thought I'd gone out of my mind."

"He rocked me too until I found out his name," Flaherty said. "Then I realized that it must be just another Randall gag, I mean a family tradition, sir. You know the way every Randall who has ever been at St. Thomas' always wears that same dopey old jockey cap when he goes out for crew. I think this kid's parents just thought they'd start a new tradition by sending him off in his grandfather's suits."

"It's inhuman!" Stetson said. "That boy'll be lucky if his classmates don't kill him."

"I think he can take good care of himself," Bugs said decidedly. "I asked him about his clothes and he told me that suit had been saved specially in moth balls for today and that his regular stuff was being checked through on his ticket or something and hadn't turned up. He was delighted because he said nobody could soak him any demerits for not changing his collar and shirt for supper."

Stetson stared. "What did you say?"

"I told him you'd given up the demerit system and he was tickled pink. That's the funny thing about him, sir. He's pleased over everything but instead of thinking he's a fresh new kid in crazy clothes you find yourself liking him and somehow getting a bigger kick out of being alive yourself."

Stetson, who had had exactly the same experience, nodded. "Where's he rooming?" he asked. "Who's his roommate?"

Flaherty reached in his pocket for a list that wasn't there and shrugged apologetically. "Darned if I know, sir, but he'd found his room and thought it was a knockout! If you ask me he isn't feeling any pain even over his clothes."

"Get him out of them!" Stetson said. "Put him in your own clothes or your roommate's, but by supper time see that he looks human."

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"Yes, sir! Peewee Prentice ought to have something that'd be small enough."

Stetson turned and hurried over to the Head's house which he still had difficulty in thinking of as home. Mollie was waiting for him on the porch and her serene, sensible face looked worried. "Devons worse?" Stetson asked and she shook her head reassuringly.

"Tibby Birkett hasn't called and she would have if there'd been the slightest change. Johnny darling, how'd the speech go?"

"Speech? Why O.K., I guess," Stetson said and realized that he had been too interested in the Randall boy to care.

"I knew you'd be good," Mollie said and hurried on to more urgent matters. "Mrs. Bissett has called you long distance three times in the last half hour and wants you to call her back. Joel Pendergast called up on the school phone and he's coming right over to see you. Neither of them would leave messages and they both sounded furious."

"Dear Lord deliver us!" Stetson said and went to his study telephone.

Three minutes later he was aware that Mollie had not exaggerated Mrs. Bissett's anger. The childless old lady whose late husband had once gone to St. Thomas' had just heard that Stetson had not only kept on the Devons boy after his disgrace of last spring, but had actually given him a partial scholarship. As Mrs. Bissett had been in the direct line of fire from Chuck's stink bomb, she felt that shooting him made more sense than what Stetson had done. And now she had telephoned to say that unless he was dismissed at once the money which she had promised to St. Thomas' would be willed to some other institution.

"The boy is very ill," Stetson began but Mrs. Bissett didn't even let him finish the sentence. Fifteen minutes later, when she finally slammed down the receiver, Stetson felt wilted. It was one thing to joke with Mollie about Mrs. Bissett's tantrums, but it would be quite another to explain to his board why the very substantial sum of money which she had promised to leave St. Thomas' was being withdrawn on his first day as headmaster.

Stetson did not have time to fill his pipe before Pendergast stormed into the study and launched into a fusillade of generalized complaints and grievances.

"But what specifically went wrong today?" Stetson asked. "What's the 'immediate occasion' of trouble?"

Pendergast snorted. "Trouble? I spent the early afternoon in the laboratory preparing for my first class tomorrow. When I left, the floor between my desk and the door literally bristled with upturned carpet tacks meticulously arranged where no one but I would step on them. I thought of Devons, of course. Ever since you've given that puppy a false idea of his

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own brilliance he's had it in for me, simply because I wouldn't upset my entire teaching schedule to accommodate him."

Stetson's eyes grew bluer with anger. "Devons couldn't have done it. He's in the infirmary."

"I know that!" Pendergast snapped. "I made very careful inquiries without letting it be known why I wanted the information and discovered that the only person to enter the building beside myself was a new boy in preposterous old-fashioned clothes."

"Not Randall!"

"Yes! Randall. As soon as I learned the name I went to Bascom, whom you appointed as School Registrar over older and wiser candidates, and he had the insolence to say there was no such boy in the school."

"But that's absurd," Stetson said. "I've spoken with Jim Randall myself."

Pendergast turned purple. "Of course it's absurd. But when I asked *your* Mr. Bascom to check his records he said he didn't have time as *you* had given him the day off. My God! The School Registrar taking off the first day of term. It's preposterous!"

"Bascom's wife is having a baby," Stetson said. "He took her down to the hospital this morning. It's their first child and I told him to clear out."

Pendergast did not listen. He talked on and on about how he had given the best years of his life to St. Thomas' and said if the behavior of boys like Devons and Randall was to be condoned by the new regime it was no longer any place for him. In a matter of moments he tendered his resignation with so much animosity and vituperation that Stetson had no choice but to accept. "I hope you'll be happier somewhere else," he said. "Perhaps at a college instead of a school."

Pendergast stormed out of the room and Stetson realized that his own mouth was twitching as it had not done since the ship on which he had served during World War II had been shelled off Tokyo. He took a deep breath and forced himself to think constructively. He reached in his desk for his list of new boys only to remember that he had left it in his office in the main schoolhouse. At that moment the bell rang for chapel and he hurried upstairs to wash, trying to piece together what he knew about the Randall family. "Mollie? Oh Mol!" As usual he turned to his wife for help with names. "Who was the old boy I showed around the school the first year we came back here?"

"Randall." Mollie caught him instantly. "Mr. MacCombe Randall and the model old Grad if you ask me. Looked at everything and everybody and never once said it was better in the old days."

"He may have thought plenty," Stetson said. "Still, do you know if he had a son? A kid who might be a new boy this year?"

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Molly's reflection stared at him from the dressing table mirror. "Are you mad? That Mr. Randall's 75 if he's a day and besides as far as I know he's a bachelor. Why?"

At that moment the telephone rang and when Mollie straightened up from answering it her forehead was lined. "Tibby Birkett for you," she said. "Chuck Devons is worse."

Stetson hurried over to the infirmary and as soon as Miss Birkett led him into Chuck's room he understood why she was so alarmed. The boy lay as rigidly still as before but his breathing was more labored and the bones of his skull seemed to protrude like a mummy's. "Chuck," Stetson said. "Chuck, fella —" Neither Stetson's voice nor his awkward, loving touch on the boy's forehead and shoulder made the slightest impression.

Stetson reached chapel just in time for the service and then managed to put in one more unsuccessful call for Devons' father before supper. The tall doors of the dining room opened just as he came into the building, and a moment later Mollie, looking as composed and unselfconscious as though she had been a headmaster's wife all her days, led the way into the dining room and took her place at the long head table.

Stetson bowed his head as the chaplain asked a blessing and prayed privately and silently for strength. God help me to do a decent job. God help me and help this school. After his long discouraging day he felt the prayer so intensely that for a moment as 300 chairs were pulled out and 600 feet clattered under the tables he was dizzy.

The feeling passed instantly and Stetson looked up to see that a very small boy dressed in the inevitable gray flannels was beaming at him from the next table. Stetson smiled back, glad the child wasn't homesick, and then recognized the boy as Randall and saw he was looking as bland and assured as a poodle puppy in his borrowed clothes. Good for Flaherty, Stetson thought and turned back to his own table.

Several people came up to speak to Stetson after supper and he was the last person to leave the dining hall. Mollie had already gone home, followed by the sixth formers who were now privileged to smoke in the headmaster's study after supper. As Stetson crossed the dark campus he heard the older boys' husky voices and deep laughter and smiled to himself. He was glad they were happy, but he felt no nostalgic yearning whatsoever for his own schooldays at St. Thomas'. During his youth, on opening night, every boy jack in the school had been forced to spend a useless and depressing evening in one of the two barren study halls that now housed the infirmary. The Old Head invariably preached to the sixth form while the rest of the boys had to listen to the sarcastic sadisms of Tic-Tac Cole. Cole had received his nickname long before Stetson's schooldays, when some unknown but not

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unhonored jokester had hung an old-fashioned Halloween noisemaker outside the study hall window on opening night. Cole deserved it, Stetson thought, and let himself into his own comfortably boy-filled study.

He had just reached the door on the far side when he heard the school football captain telling Bugs Flaherty about the new boys' first football practise. "Darnedest thing I've ever seen," the captain said. "That little kid Randall's faster than anybody on the first team."

"That's the boy!" Bugs said and gave his headmaster a look which said, I told you Randall would make out O.K.

Stetson grinned and went on upstairs just as the telephone rang, and the operator was finally able to put him through to Devons' father. Stetson told him exactly what had happened and did not minimize either his own or Dr. Harris' anxiety. Mr. Devons was immovable in his decision not to come up to the school.

Stetson hung up feeling angrier and more frustrated than he had ever felt in his life. Except for the insignificant detail of the Randall boy's switch in clothing, the whole day had been a failure. He went downstairs, and as he let himself out into the damp evening air his lean jaw relaxed a little.

At least Jimmy Randall's all right, Stetson thought, and his step grew lighter. I like him and he trusts me. We understand and respect one another. Eventually that's the way it's going to be with the whole school.

Tibby Birkett was waiting for Stetson at the infirmary door. She led him into the sick boy's room and then stood aside as he moved toward the bed. For a ghastly moment it came to Stetson that the boy was already dead but then he heard his shallow breathing and touching his hand found it warm. He looked up into Tibby Birkett's frightened eyes.

"I thought he was gone too," she said, when they were back in the corridor, "He's been like that since 6:30. I'm pinning my hopes on his family being able to get through to him. Are they coming up tonight or tomorrow?"

"Neither," Stetson said. "His mother's living abroad and his father says he can't come."

Miss Birkett grimaced and returned to the sick room. Stetson went down a flight of stairs and turned aimlessly into what had once been the Lower School Study and was now in the process of being converted into two six-bed wards. The contractors had left a sizeable mass of materials at one end of the room, but except for that, and the fact that it was stripped of furniture, it looked much as it had during Stetson's boyhood, when Lower Study had stood for everything that was most repressive and viciously disciplinary in school.

The last of the prison house, Stetson thought, and high time too. He was

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about to switch out the light and leave when he heard a loud clatter somewhere ahead of him. For a moment he could not place the sound but as it continued he realized that it came from the window directly below Devons' room. He hurried toward the noise and saw that a metal clapper hanging from a rubber suction cap was beating against the outside of the window pane.

He turned and ran out of the building and in a matter of minutes he had torn off the cap and dropped the disgusting gadget in his pocket. For an instant the sudden silence was infinite and Stetson stood breathless from anger. There was no excuse for such a trick. By now every boy in the school knew the old study hall housed the infirmary and most of them knew Chuck Devons was sick. Hanging up the clapper was more than inexcusable. It was infamous. A cad's trick that made a mockery of student government.

Stetson stepped forward into the darkness, stumbled, and would have fallen if he had not caught himself on some stinging barberry bushes. As he straightened up he heard footsteps pattering down the front steps of the infirmary and then saw the shadow of a small, grotesquely dapper figure in the path beyond. "Randall. Randall, I see you!" Stetson roared as he floundered through the bushes. "Stop at once."

There was no answer. By the time Stetson reached the front of the building there was no one in sight and he turned on his heel and hurried home.

Mollie was waiting for him in the front hall. "A man by the name of Pierson's just called long distance," she said. "He says it's urgent and that he tried to reach you earlier but the phone was busy."

"He'll have to wait!" Stetson said and reached for the inter-school phone. "Right now I need to see Bugs Flaherty and young Randall."

It took Bugs Flaherty nearly half an hour to reach the master's study and then he arrived looking hot, breathless, and with enough clothes over his arm to dress a scarecrow.

"Where's Randall?" Stetson asked icily. "I left word for him to come over at once."

"I don't know, sir." Bugs' broad face looked puzzled. "I — I don't think anyone knows."

"What do you mean?" Stetson rapped out. "Of course someone knows."

Flaherty produced the prefect's list he had not been able to find earlier and put it on the Headmaster's desk. "He's not on my list, sir," he said, "and I've just found out none of the other dorm prefects have him on theirs."

"Impos —" Stetson began, but suddenly he remembered what Pendergast had said about the Registrar and leaned forward. "When did you last see Randall?" he asked. "Where and when?"

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Bugs looked uncomfortable. "I haven't *seen* him since supper," he said. "But a half an hour ago Peewee wanted his clothes back and I went over to Main to tell Randall. On the way I heard him whistling that same crazy tune somewhere in the shadows near Memorial Fountain. I called out to him about the clothes and he yelled back he'd left 'em in Dump House, whatever that is, and Peewee could help himself."

Stetson's mouth was suddenly dry. Dump House, more properly Dumfries, had once housed the first and second forms. It had been pulled down 40 years before. "I thought Randall was getting fresh," Bugs went on, "so I told him to come out of the shadows and when he didn't I chased him until I tripped over Peewee's clothes. I went back to Main for my flashlight and then I heard you wanted to see me."

Stetson glanced at his watch and then stood up. "I'll have to be back at the infirmary for a consultation at 9·30," he said, "but in the meantime you and I are going to find Master Randall."

"That's good with me," Bugs said grimly and led the way to where he had tripped over the borrowed clothes. There was no one in sight and they began on a systematic search along the stone wall that bounded the school property. For several minutes they saw nothing and heard nothing and then Bugs stopped short and sniffed. "Moth balls!" he said, "and I hear that same darned tune!"

Stetson stiffened. The smell of camphor was overpowering, and now he heard a boy's soprano humming the *Mulligan Guards*, and the next moment the sound of an iron gate being pulled open and shut over gravel. It was followed by the unmistakable click of a metal latch.

Bugs plunged forward, but by the time he reached the spot where the sound had come from there was no one there. Stetson trained his flash lamp on the trembling ivy, but except for some newer looking stones this part of the wall was like all the rest. He straightened up, sniffing, and found the fall smells of raked leaves and misty dampness had replaced the smell of camphor. "Can you tie that?" Bugs said. "I'd have sworn there was a gate here."

"There was," Stetson said. "An ornamental iron gate. It used to lead onto the main drive in the old horse and carriage days. It blew over in the 1938 hurricane and the school couldn't afford to replace it."

At that moment the sound of laughter carried over the wall only to be drowned out by the heavy mechanical roar of a passing truck. "God! Randall!" Bugs gasped and vaulted over the wall. Stetson followed him and then they both stared after the flickering red tail light. The road on either side was hemmed in by stone walls which a child the size of Randall could not possibly have vaulted. There was no escape and yet as they turned the flashlight from side to side, the road behind the truck was perfectly empty.

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"So Randall isn't — he wasn't —" Bugs began and now he trembled so that Stetson was afraid he would fall.

"Come home and then we'll talk about it," Stetson said and led the boy the long way around the wall to his own house.

Mollie must have heard the front door for as they walked in she hurried downstairs. "Johnny! The most wonderful news. Chuck Devons is better! Marvelously better. Tibby called up and said he was sitting up in bed looking practically well. Not a trace of paralysis. Harris telephoned too and said to tell you he's thanking God you stuck to your guns about not moving him."

Stetson stood with his arm still around Flaherty. "When?" he demanded. "Exactly when did Devons start to mend. Do they know?"

Mollie looked at him curiously. "Why, yes," she said. "That's the funny part of it. It must have been about quarter to 9 when Tibby went out of Chuck's room for a few minutes because there was some clattery noise below his window. When she came back she thought she saw a very small boy in queer clothes slip down the corridor. She didn't dare go after him because she didn't want to leave Chuck any longer, so she went straight into his room and found him sitting up, laughing. Johnny — Bugs — what's the matter with both of you?"

Before Stetson could answer they heard the loud imperious ring that meant long distance. "Take care of Bugs," Stetson said and mechanically reached toward the telephone.

"This is Howard Pierson speaking," an unfamiliar voice began. "Of the law firm of Pierson, Donahue, Bryarson and Stape. I'm sorry to call you so late, but Mr. Scott, the chairman of your board, asked me to communicate with you at the earliest possible moment and I wasn't able to reach you earlier."

"What is it?" Stetson asked and braced himself for he knew not what. The lawyer spoke on and on in a clear, precise voice but Stetson did not make a sound. "Did you hear me?" Pierson asked finally. "Mr. Stetson, did you hear what I said?"

"Would you repeat it?" Stetson asked. "The name of your client, the sum he has left to the school?"

Howard Pierson repeated what he had just said and added: "I must say I don't blame you for being stunned by such good news. I was amazed myself. One of my partners drew up this new will and I did not see it until after Mr. Randall's death early this morning. To tell you the truth I had no idea he was so attached to his old school or even that he had visited it recently and become interested in the new — er — liberal policies."

"James MacCombe Randall loved St. Thomas'," Stetson said stoutly.

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"And he visited us recently. Very recently indeed, and I am certain that he liked what he saw."

"He must have! And of course his bequest is a very concrete expression of personal confidence in you. You understand that under the terms of the will your word is absolute as to how the money shall be spent?"

Hank Thacher will replace Pendergast, Stetson thought. Chuck Devons and more boys like him will have a chance. He looked up and found Mollie and Bugs staring at him and he smiled at them before he answered the lawyer's last question. "Immediately? Increase the staff and the number of scholarships and then I think we'll build a swimming pool to be named in Mr. Randall's honor. Up until now the boys have never had any body of water except Memorial Fountain."

The Unquiet Grave

"Clump, clump" — in the grave I hear.
Hark to the tread
Over my head;
Raise up the tombstone and tell him to halt.
"Hi, you!
Get off my tummy!"
— Such slander, a gander runs over my grass.

"Thump, thump" — no lad but a lass.
What have we here?
Eggs in my bier?
Eggs all over my nice, clean vault?
"Fry two!
Alas, poor mummy!"
— Pax vobiscum and pass me the salt.

WINONA McCLINTIC

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

MAN'S COMING CONQUEST of space, as has often been pointed out, has been more extensively described before the event, in fact and fiction, than any other crucial development in human history. There are advantages to this: scientifically, we may find ourselves better prepared than we were, say, for the Industrial Revolution.

But there's one serious danger, both psychological and esthetic: We may talk and write and thresh the whole damned thing out so thoroughly beforehand that we lose all sense of awe and wonder and epic adventure. To a large extent this is happening in science fiction already; very few indeed are the writers who can make the voyage of a spaceship as stirring as Gunnar Heyerdahl made the voyage of a raft in KON-TIKI. We tend to take our wonders for granted even before we possess them.

As an infinitely welcome exception to this tendency, we open our arms and hearts to Arthur C. Clarke's AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT (Gnome). No one knows the probable scientific details of the space-future better than Mr. Clarke, as he has proved in numerous factual studies and semi-factual novels; but this brief but intense book represents another side of Clarke — the visionary poet of a future so far distant that its most prosaic science passes our technical understanding. Even in that far future men will have aspirations, undefined yearnings, intimations of immortality — and out of these Clarke shapes a beautiful novel, at once the story of the maturing of a boy who does not quite conform to his race, and of the re-maturing of that smugly decadent race itself. Here indeed is poetry and awe and wonder — and a fine gradual leading of the reader from the small and immediate to the universal and vast.

In Clarke's mastery of this technique of gradualness, you may be reminded of the best work of the late master, W. Olaf Stapledon, whose principal works have just been collected as TO THE END OF TIME (Funk & Wagnalls), edited by Basil Davenport. This important volume will be reviewed at proper length next month; meanwhile let us say that such an editor's selection from such an author demands your immediate attention.

The lack of this sense of wonder is the great weakness of Fletcher Pratt's THE UNDYING FIRE (Ballantine). This ingenious and often entertaining

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interstellar retelling of the voyage of the Argonauts is the most readable of Mr. Pratt's longer fictions to date; but his faster-than-light zooming from star to star seems pallid and everyday beside the bold venturing out over Earth's small seas of the wooden oars of the original *Argo*. Hal Clement's ICEWORLD (Gnome) hardly stirs wonder or any other emotion of good fiction; thinly plotted and characterized, its appeal is purely intellectual . . . and by no means negligible. Even Mr. Clement has never done a better job of making plausible and scientifically convincing every detail of the physiology and technology of an alien race — in this case, high-temperature breathers of gaseous sulfur who find this earth a frightening frozen world, — a race so absorbingly created and described that you may well put up with an unfair amount of novelistic tedium.

The first two batches of Winston's teen-age science fiction novels, uneven though they were, contained some remarkable highspots by such authors as Poul Anderson, Arthur C. Clarke, Raymond F. Jones and Chad Oliver. The third lot contains no such buried treasure. Robert W. Lowndes's MYSTERY OF THE THIRD MINE is a readable and plausible juvenile adventure story of the asteroid belt, and Erik van Lhin's BATTLE ON MERCURY embodies some good depiction of alien life in a rather flat story; the rest of the list can be passed over in silence.

The year's output of science-fantasy anthologies has now reached . . . um, let's see . . . twelve. (That's twelve books issued in a little under twenty weeks!) Of the three most recent collections to come bouncing off the assembly line the best, by a standard of pure literary quality, is William Tenn's CHILDREN OF WONDER (Simon & Schuster). The book is a wondrous adventure for the novice; the veteran reader must decide for himself if he wants to buy a book some 75 per cent of which, as editor Tenn states frankly in his introduction, is available elsewhere, in all sorts of editions. Perhaps the veteran will agree with us that Theodore Sturgeon's unreprinted short novel, BABY IS THREE, is well worth the price of the complete volume. To do the definitive anthology of robot stories perhaps an editor must do as Tenn did and say, "The hell with the number of times these stories have been previously printed." Martin Greenberg has, instead, attempted to shape the definitive robot collection out of (with one exception) never-reprinted stories, and found himself facing an all but impossible task. There's nothing definitive about the fruit of his labor, THE ROBOT AND MAN (Gnome); it's a generally uninspired collection, whose drabness is relieved only by Robert Moore Williams' moving *Robots Return* and is emphasized by Lester Del Rey's preposterous *Into Thy Hands*. PRIZE SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Donald A. Wollheim (McBride), is obviously intended as competition to the annual BEST SCIENCE FICTION

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STORIES, edited by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty. Judging from this first effort with its fifth-rate comic book jacket and its steeply inclined level of writing that skids abruptly from two superlative stories (by Gordon Dickson and C. M. Kornbluth) down — way down! — through a handful of mediocrities to some of the most pretentious trash ever put between hardcovers, Messrs. Bleiler and Dikty run no risk of ulcers.

A word here about those editions dubbed variously "softcover editions," "two-bit reprints," or "pocket books" (albeit Pocket Books, Inc. deeply resents such generic appellation . . . as does General Motors when you refer to your Gibson electric refrigerator as a "Frigidaire!") There was a time when the serious collector of science and/or fantasy fiction faced a spate of publications (at prices anywhere from $2 to $3.95) that simply overwhelmed his pocketbook. Now, those two-bit, soft cover, pocket book reprints have solved that problem. Just be patient, watch your newsstands and you can buy the best of currently published improbabilia, done in good format, attractively covered and very attractively priced. Now and again these generous publishers come up with an hitherto hard-to-get classic of the past. For example: look for F. Anstey's hilarious, yet rigorously logical fantasy, THE BRASS BOTTLE (Penguin, 35¢) — a long out-of-print masterpiece of djinns raising merry hell with modern Londoners. And, if there's a gap in the "W" section of your library, go out and buy, for 25¢, the Pocket Book (a *genuine* Pocket Book!) edition of that peerless classic, THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, by H. G. Wells.

The latest Chesley Bonestell paintings to appear in book form are eight plates depicting possible world-catastrophe in Kenneth Heuer's THE END OF THE WORLD (Rinehart). Unfortunately, these pictures, obviously painted in full color, are reproduced in black-and-white, and seem almost as drab as Mr. Heuer's unorganized mishmash of fact, superstition, informed conjecture and pure fantasy. In this, as in his previous effort at fact-for-the-science-fiction-reader, Heuer continues to allow Willy Ley, L. Sprague de Camp and Martin Gardner to sleep well of nights, unworried by competition.

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University professors are traditionally worried men. In addition to the worrisome problems of scholarship, they perpetually face the puzzle of supporting a family on a scholar's salary, and more recently the problem of supporting a scholar's integrity in the face of political demands for intellectual conformity. But one professorial worry is restricted to the faculty of an unnamed Pennsylvania college: How is traditional scholarship to survive the inadvertent advances of Professor Cleanth Penn Ransom? This time it is the Department of Romance Languages which suffers the irruption of the tubby mathematician; and the teaching of Dante will never be the same again after this contact with a TV puppet program, an engineer-impresario, and an epileptic genius who happens to be a parrot.

The Cerebrative Psittacoid

by H. NEARING, JR.

"Moses," said Professor Cleanth Penn Ransom, of the Mathematics Faculty, "Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, St. Paul, Mohammed, Martin Luther, Ignatius Loyola, Peter the Great, Napoleon —"

"I say, old boy," said Professor Archibald MacTate, of Philosophy, "are you rehearsing for some sort of survey course? I think you should add dates, at least."

"No, no." Ransom stuck out his little belly and began to swing in his swivel chair. "I was just running over the list of real bright epileptics that Worthington belongs to."

"Worthington?" MacTate crossed his long legs and lit a cigarette.

"Sure. He's a sort of an epileptic genius." Ransom waved vaguely south. "Comes from Oak Ridge. I guess he was born too close to a nuclear pile or something. Anyway, the hemispheres of his brain don't match, electrically speaking. Charge in the cortex on one side keeps building up until it's so big it's got to overflow into the other one and cause a fit."

"But, Ransom, who is —?"

"Of course," said Ransom, "Worthington doesn't have fits, on account of this head thing I fixed up for him. Couple of electrodes with a juiced-up hearing-aid-type battery. So there's a constant trickle of electricity from

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one hemisphere to the other and the differential never builds up to the fit point, you might say."

"Ransom, who —?"

"But either the charge increase that's left or the trickle itself keeps driving his mind to one idea after another. And for some reason, ever since I put the electrodes on him there seems to be an increase in potential about where the Convolution of Broca ought to be. Speech center. You know. Ordinarily he shouldn't be able to say much until he's around 45, but with this setup he's already making up his own. Words, I mean. So that's how I got the idea of teaching him to —"

"*Quel giorno più*," said a resonant baritone voice, "*non vi leggemmo avanti*."

MacTate looked up. "Isn't that —?"

"That's him." Ransom nodded. "He's resting up for his lecture. I stepped up the electric trickle to knock him out, but he keeps talking in his sleep."

MacTate looked around the room. "I meant wasn't that Dante someone was quoting. Sounds familiar."

"Oh, that." Ransom grinned. "Sure, that's Dante. First thing Worthington learned to say before he turned into a genius. Every night when my nephew at Oak Ridge put his books away he'd say that to him. It's Francesca da Rimini telling how she got into trouble while she and her boyfriend were reading about Lancelot and Guinevere. 'That day we read no further.' Only of course my nephew didn't mean —"

"But, Ransom, where —?" MacTate was still looking around the room.

"He's sleeping, like I told you." Ransom pointed. "In the closet." He stopped swinging. "I guess it's time to wake him up. As I was saying, I got the idea of teaching him to read Italian and he went crazy over Dante, where he already had a one-line start you might say. Read every book about him in the library. And since he doesn't have any hands, his brain gets interested in things that a cortex cluttered with manual cells wouldn't notice so much. Awful pedant. That's why —"

"Ransom." MacTate put out his cigarette. "*Who* is Worthington?"

Ransom grinned. "I'll show you." He went to the closet, opened the door, reached inside for a moment and then stepped back. "Come on out, Worthington. I've got another recruit for your lecture."

MacTate could see nothing until the resonant baritone, rising from the floor, prompted him to look down.

"*Haut les mains, enfants!*" A little green parrot with an oversized head was aiming a claw at them in the manner of a revolver. It chuckled throatily, swaggered to Ransom's desk, beat its wings and perched on the crossbar of the desk lamp. "Why the hell didn't you teach me French, Ransom? You

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can say such damned silly things in it and sound perfectly serious all the time." It dived forward, clinging to the crossbar with its claws, and swung in a full circle back to its original position.

"You can do that in any language," said Ransom. "Look, Worthington, meet Professor MacTate. Like I said, I think we can get him to come to the lecture."

"Greetings." Worthington swung around the crossbar again. MacTate noticed that he wore what looked like diminutive earphones, from which a wire ran to something beneath his breast feathers. "But listen, Ransom, what about that son of a bitch Strombetti? If you don't get him —"

"Now look, Worthington. What did I tell you? That's no kind of a name to call Professor Strombetti. Did you ever hear me say anything like that?"

"Sure. The other day you told him he didn't know his —"

"Never *mind* what I told him." Ransom scowled. "I'm not trying to get a job in his department."

"Now you're catching on, Ransom." Worthington swung around the crossbar again. "That's why he's got to be at the lecture. I'll show him whether I'm smart enough to teach in his lousy department."

MacTate looked quizzically at his colleague's protégé. "Tell me, Worthington, what's the subject of your lecture?"

"A Reexamination of Some Cruxes in the *Inferno*. Or do you say *Cruces?*" Worthington looked at him thoughtfully. "Hell, I don't know. Anyway, how about if we get going? Pretty near time, isn't it?"

Ransom looked at his wristwatch. "Almost 5. I'll get your —"

"Old boy." MacTate looked puzzled. "Do you think 5 o'clock is a good time for a lecture?"

"Wait, MacTate." Ransom glanced at Worthington, whose head was under his wing busily biting the axilla. He beckoned MacTate to the closet and spoke in a whisper. "It's not an official affair, see. Just you and me and a couple of my graduate students I bullied into going. Worthington doesn't know it of course, but I picked a time when Strombetti probably wouldn't be around. If he knew Worthington was lecturing in a language class —"

"But won't Worthington see that he's not in the audience?"

"No." Ransom reached into the closet and took out a rectangular wire cage and a mahogany-colored cloth. "He'll be in this, with the cloth over him. I convinced him people might be distracted by his looks and not pay proper attention to what he was saying."

"What the hell are you whispering about, Ransom?" Worthington had stopped scratching and was regarding them suspiciously.

"Don't be so nosy, Worthington." Ransom went to him with the cage. "Here. Get in."

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"Doesn't he have to use notes?" said MacTate.

"Notes." Worthington gave him a look and climbed into the cage. "What the hell do I want with them? They're for stupid bastards like Strombetti."

"Now look, Worthington." Ransom aimed a finger at him. "You promised you'd watch your language at this lecture. And here it's just a few minutes to go, and you're not making any effort to taper off."

"Relax, Ransom." Worthington settled comfortably in the cage. "It'll all be in the purest tradition of scholarship."

"Better be." Ransom covered the cage with the cloth and tucked it under his arm. "Come on, MacTate."

He led the way to a classroom on the fourth floor and turned on the light. The room was already occupied by three graduate students of a mathematical cast in whose countenances boredom contended with hunger.

"Ah," said Ransom, directing his voice toward the draped cage. "Sizable audience." He turned to the graduate students and soundlessly mouthed the word *clap*. They set up a half-hearted applause, redoubling their efforts when Ransom scowled.

"How about you-know-who?" said Worthington. "Is he out there, Ransom?"

"I — By the way, Worthington." Ransom set the cage on the desk at the front of the room and smoothed the drape. "I think I'd say *cruxes* instead of *cruces*. You don't want to make it too high-toned."

"But listen, Ransom, what about Strombetti? If he's not here yet —"

"My God." Ransom perceived himself fixed by a hostile eye at the door. "Speak of the devil." He turned to MacTate. "Stay here with Worthington a minute. And whatever you do, don't let him talk till I get back."

"But, old boy —"

Ransom went down the aisle to the door and tried to contort his face into a cordial grin. "Well, Strombetti. What brings you here?"

"I shouldn't be here, I suppose?" Strombetti wriggled his mustache. "These language classrooms, they're only for the mathematicians to turn the lights on in, I suppose." He shook his finger angrily in Ransom's face. "Suppose you tell me what *you're* doing here."

"Don't get excited, Strombetti." Ransom looked apprehensively at the draped cage. "Keep your voice down. I've got these graduate students that want a little tutoring, and I never dreamed that you'd be — that these classrooms would be in demand at this hour."

"I suppose I'm a mathematician, I go home early." Strombetti glared at the graduate students. "What's the matter? Don't you have mathematics classrooms you can take your lunkheads in?"

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"I can explain that, Strombetti. We're studying Codazzi's equations,— theory of surfaces, *you* know — and I thought a little atmosphere . . ."

Down at the desk Worthington was growing impatient. "Where the hell did Ransom go? You there, MacTate?"

"Yes, Worthington. Ransom said you were not to —"

"Listen. Did Strombetti come in yet?"

MacTate regarded the figure at the door. "Well, if I'm not mistaken —"

"That's all I wanted to know. Sit down, MacTate."

"No, Worthington. Good heavens —"

"Fellow scholars," came the resonant baritone. "I propose to consider with you — or rather, reconsider — a number of cru — cruxes in the greatest poem of our heritage. On the present occasion I shall confine my remarks to the *Inferno*, although the *Purgatorio* and many passages of the *Paradiso* might offer equally stimulating, if less familiar, challenges to the *Spitzelgefühl*, or sleuth instinct, so to speak. First I submit the well-known opening lines of the seventh canto: '*Papè Satan, papè Satan, aleppe*' *Cominciò Pluto con la voce chioccia.* In other words Pluto, jailer of the grasping and the spendthrift, greets Virgil and Dante 'with velicative tongue,' or literally, 'with clucking voice,' saying '*Papae Satan*' etcetera. This comminatory remark — for Virgil identifies it as such by reassuring Dante as to the limitations of the monster's power — was interpreted by the older commentators as an incantation in French: *Pas paix, Satan, pas paix, Satan, a l'épée*, or in Hebrew: *Bab-e-shatan, bab-e-shatan, alep*, to signify that Hell has conquered in contradiction of Matthew XVI, 18; or simply as meaningless jargon like the words of Nimrod in Canto XXXI. This last view commends itself to several of my learned colleagues, including Professor Strombetti, despite the fact that a fragment of a satire in Latin verse referring to Pope Honorius as '*papa Sathan*' was discovered in a Twelfth-Century manuscript of Copenhagen and published in the *Historische Vierteljahrschrift* (Volume XXX) as long ago as 1935. Moreover, although the parts of the satire which might explain the word *aleppe* in Pluto's remark are not extant, there is a somewhat longer quotation from the same satire in a manuscript of the municipal library of Rouen (A 376, folio 179) which suggests that the poem was a series of invectives against various popes, all of whom were named 'Popes Satan' among other epithets, thus accounting for Dante's use of the plural *papè*, or *papae*."

Worthington cleared his throat. "All this, mind you, is well known to the true student of Dante. But can you imagine that Strombetti? Instead of admitting that a satire famous enough to furnish Dante with an allusion could be almost entirely lost, he keeps on teaching his classes that Pluto's remark is 'meaningless jargon.' Not —"

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"Worthington," said MacTate, who had been staring at the draped cage as one stunned, "hadn't you better —"

"Not," continued Worthington, "that I'm impugning the old boy's rationality. Let's be fair. His errors are due only to ignorance. He has these other interests, see, like this puppet show he fools around with, and he can't keep up with all the stuff you ought to know to teach Dante right. But that's what makes me mad at the . . ."

Back at the door Strombetti faced Ransom with bulging eyes. "So, Ransom. You brought that bird-brained parrot up here after I told you —"

"Look, Strombetti —"

"Trying to hide him, too, with that silly —" Strombetti glared at the draped cage. "Well, you won't do it again." He headed for the desk.

". . . And he knows perfectly well," Worthington was saying, "that this bird is an accomplished Dante scholar, but he still won't give him a job in the department. How low can you —"

Strombetti reached the cage and whipped off the drape. Worthington, who was clinging to the top lecturing upside down, craned his neck around to stare into his enemy's face. "Well, look who's here. What do you say, Strombettaccio? Do I get a job, or haven't you had enough yet?"

"I'll show you who's had enough, you damned little vulture." Strombetti tore the top off the cage and seized Worthington by the neck.

"Take your hands off my neck, you lousy *guaglio*." Worthington twisted and tried to beat his wings.

"Of course. When you stop breathing." Strombetti increased the pressure a little with a kind of cautious roughness.

"Ransom," squawked Worthington. "He's trying to kill me. Ransom!"

"Let go of him, Strombetti." Ransom came up and grabbed his sleeve. "MacTate —"

"Not till he promises he'll never come up here again." Strombetti elbowed Ransom and backed away from MacTate, who was advancing uncertainly.

"All right. I promise. I promise." Worthington broke away from his enemy's relaxing fingers and flapped up to the light fixture. "For trying to get a job you can kill people?" He began to preen his ruffled feathers with injured dignity.

Strombetti whirled around. "And as for you, Ransom —"

"Look, Strombetti, you weren't really going to hurt him, were you? I just wanted to let him show off a little for my math boys here." Ransom glanced at Worthington and waved a silent *congé* to his graduate students, who departed with alacrity. "We could have used a room downstairs, but he's got such a sharp sense of direction —"

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"His sharp sense better keep him away from *this* direction." Strombetti glared up at Worthington. "I let him go this time, but this is a promise, Ransom. If I ever catch him up here again —" He flourished his finger in an angry aposiopesis, went to the door and snapped off the light.

"Hey, Strombetti." Worthington stopped preening. "What about my job? Don't tell me you're still not convinced —"

"Shut up, Worthington." Ransom picked up the cage and motioned to him to fly into it. "You just escape getting strangled and all you can think about is a job." He closed the cage on Worthington and hung the drape over it. "Strombetti was right. You *are* a bird-brain."

MacTate, discreetly deciding against following his colleague, went home. The next morning, while he sat in his office sketching grotesque designs in the margins of the *Journal of Aesthetics*, his phone rang.

"Look, MacTate. Do *you* have any idea where Worthington is?"

"Why, no, old boy. The last I saw of him, you were taking him back to your office after the — lecture. I thought I could compliment him with more propriety at a later time, so I —"

"Look. Come over and help me find him. God knows what he's up to."

When MacTate opened the door of Ransom's office, he found his colleague listening to a crackling tirade on the phone.

"Yes, Strombetti . . . Perfectly right. No excuse for that sort of thing." Ransom took the receiver away from his ear, winced, and put it back again. "No, no. You have my personal assurance that nothing like that will ever happen again. I —"

There was a tap at the door. MacTate opened it. Worthington came in and went to his perch on the desk lamp.

"Here he is now," said Ransom. "I'll lay down the law to him, Strombetti. Thanks for calling." He hung up, leaned back in his swivel chair, and fixed Worthington with a rhadamanthine eye.

Worthington, strangely silent, stuck his beak under his wing and began to scratch.

"Now look, Worthington," said Ransom. "What's this about you disturbing Strombetti's Dante class this morning?"

"Did he say I disturbed them?" Worthington looked up with innocent astonishment. "I just handed them a few laughs. That's all."

"Oh. You said funny things?"

"Sure. Strombetti has this catch phrase, see. *Piangevan elli.* He says it every time a student asks a dumb question. It's from where Ugolino tells how he starved to death with his sons. *Io non piangeva, sì dentro impietrai; Piangevan elli.* 'I didn't cry, so much I petrified inside; *They* cried.' So every time he got mixed up in his notes or hedged on an interpretation, I sighed

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and said *Piangevan elli*, just the way he does. Gave the class a big charge."

"I can well imagine. I guess you've forgotten you promised him last night that you'd never go up there again."

"I *didn't* go in his room. I sat on the window sill. Flew out your window and up to his."

"But my God, Worthington — Wait." Ransom's eyes narrowed. "If you flew up outside, how come you came back through the door just now?"

"It was him. He edged over to the window and tried to bang it down on me. Is it my fault if he *forces* me into his room?"

Ransom scowled with solicitude. "Worthington, you're going to get yourself killed one of these days. I bet you had the nerve to ask him for a job again, too."

"Why not?" Worthington swung recklessly around the crossbar. "There's a fair employment law in this state, isn't there? Or is it national? Anyway, if I really wanted to make trouble —"

"Look, Worthington, let's face it. You're not a citizen. You're only —"

"Who isn't a citizen?" Worthington hopped indignantly. "I was born in this country and I can pass any voter's test you ever saw. As soon as I'm old enough. Just look up the Fifteenth Amendment, Ransom. 'The right to vote shall not be denied or abridged on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.' "

"There you are." Ransom aimed a finger at him. "Where does it say anything about species?" He shook his head sadly. "You get the craziest ideas, Worthington. I don't know what to do with you."

"Perhaps you should send him to law school," said MacTate.

"I admit you're something more than a parrot," Ransom went on. "A sort of super-psittacoid. Almost a psittaco-humanoid, maybe. But you haven't got any sense. Strombetti has a perfect right to brush you off on the ground of emotional instability."

"Hell, Ransom. If that were true, they'd have to fire every professor in the place. Listen. Suppose I liked mathematics instead of Dante. Wouldn't you give me a job?"

"Well —"

"You see? So why won't he give me one? What if I am a parrot? Hath not a parrot eyes? Hath not a parrot hands — well, claws — organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases — that's an idea: I could bite the son of a bitch and give him psittacosis . . ."

"Worthington, I told you not to —"

". . . heal'd by the same means, warm'd and cool'd by the same winter and summer, as a — Strombetti is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you

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tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that." Worthington aimed a dramatic claw at Ransom. "The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction." He cleared his throat with self-satisfaction. "*Merchant of Venice*, Act III, Scene I."

Ransom looked at him. "My God, Worthington, what a memory you've got. Like an actor. If only there was some way —"

"Old boy," said MacTate. "Doesn't Strombetti have a puppet show of some sort on the television?"

"Sure. But what's that got to do with —"

"It occurred to me that he might be more ready to employ Worthington as a voice in the puppet show than as a member of the language department. Then if Worthington ingratiated himself *there*, he might have a chance of working up to —"

"MacTate. You've —" Ransom looked at Worthington, and the gleam in his eye faded. "Still, I don't know. After what happened last night and this morning —"

"Go ahead, Ransom," said Worthington. "Fix it up for me. I'll be nice to the — to Strombetti once he gives me a job."

Ransom looked dubious. "I don't know. Better give him a week or so to simmer down."

"Good God, Ransom. You don't expect me to just sit here for a week?"

"Well, maybe you're right." Ransom scratched his nose. "I'll go talk to him. Maybe if I threaten him with what you could do in an idle week, he'll give you a job in self-defense." He got up. "Here, MacTate." He took a chess board and a box of chessmen out of his desk drawer. "You keep Worthington safely occupied till I get back."

"But, old boy —"

Ransom left.

MacTate shrugged and began to set up the pieces. Some time later he found himself facing a Roman-problem defeat as Worthington upset one desperately maneuvered stalemate after another, when Ransom came back and flopped limply into his swivel chair.

"I have just given you the best years of my life, Worthington.

"Is this a time for gags, Ransom? What did Strombetti say?"

"Well, it's a long story." Ransom folded his arms back of his head and began to swing. "In the first place he asked me if I was sure you were an epileptic, and I had to admit that it might be the electrodes that make you act crazy. Especially since you didn't show any sign of intelligence till I put them on you. It's possible that even if you did start out as an epileptic,

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you might have outgrown it by now or adjusted to it through the electrotherapy, you might say. Anyway, Strombetti suggested that if I took the electrodes off you, you might be fit to live with."

Worthington stared at him. "But, Ransom. That would be like murder, for God's sake. I couldn't — Murder?" He hopped with anguish. "That's what he's *after*. Don't you see? If he can't murder me himself, he wants to talk you into it. The sneaking, treacherous —"

"Look, Worthington. Calm down." Ransom held up a soothing hand. "How do we know you wouldn't be perfectly normal without them? You *are* a growing boy, and maybe they've served their purpose by now and are just tickling you silly. It's worth trying, anyway. Taking them off. We can always put them back on if anything goes wrong. And Strombetti will give you a job meanwhile."

Worthington looked at him suspiciously. "Just what is this job he's giving me?"

"On his puppet show." Ransom dropped his eyes. "Very responsible position. He needs a good sound-effects man."

"Christ."

"Well, what do you want? You can't hang around here starting things till Strombetti gets mad enough to really kill you." Ransom spread his hands with exasperation. "I wear myself out convincing him you would be cheaper than somebody that needs gadgets for sound effects, and that's all the thanks I get."

Worthington hopped angrily. "I suppose I should thank you for conspiring with him to murder me."

"Look, Worthington —"

"And then you have the nerve to blow about what a responsible job you got me. Doesn't he need somebody to turn the pages for him?"

"Worthington —"

"Or how about a janitor? I could sweep up the . . ."

MacTate's discretion once more prompted him to slip away. He muttered something about an engagement and softly closed the door on the rising tide of Worthington's objurgations. The next day Ransom called up to tell him that Worthington had finally agreed to Strombetti's arrangement and had gone without the electrodes for nearly eighteen hours. "No change in either intellect or personality, either. That you could notice. But he does treat Strombetti with more respect. They're up in Strombetti's office now going over the script for next week's show."

Subsequent calls reported much the same situation. "Except he gets sleepy oftener. Probably the strain of rehearsals. Don't forget, MacTate. Wednesday. Five o'clock."

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On Wednesday, at 4:30, Ransom called up and told MacTate to meet him at a bar down the street. MacTate, detained by a female graduate student with a Freudian complex involving Plato, joined his colleague before the television set at 4:49 and ordered a double scotch.

"How did you talk the bartender into getting the children's program, old boy?"

"He — Shh." Ransom pointed at the screen, on which a sign announced: "The Deth-Buz Exterminating Company Presents — Uncle Alessandro's Insect Parade."

"Boys and girls," said a confidential voice, "next time you see a bug crawling around your house, you ask mommy to call . . ."

"That isn't Worthington, is it?" said MacTate.

"No," said Ransom, "that's Strombetti. I think Worthington's first line is a telephone ring."

". . . So let's go to the little hive on Mrs. Faggioli's back yard where Giuseppe Bee is waiting to find out whether Umberto Beetle passed his swimming test." The screen showed a hexagonally reticulated wall before which an anthropoidal bee sat tapping his fingernails on a phone table. "Giuseppe, you remember, is trying to get his friend elected to the Ruscello-pattuglia Club. This is the final test. Suddenly the phone rings."

"Now," said Ransom. "Here's Worthington."

Nothing happened.

"The phone rings," repeated the television voice.

"The *phone* —"

"*Quel giorno più*," said a resonant baritone, "*non vi leggemmo avanti.*"

"My God." Ransom put his drink down. "You don't suppose —"

There was an excited whispering, followed by a flapping sound and something like a suppressed groan, and then an unconvincing attempt to imitate a telephone ring, obviously from human lips.

"MacTate. Let's get down there." Ransom threw some money on the bar and dashed out the door.

It took them thirty minutes to reach the television station through the 5-o'clock traffic. Strombetti, whom they met coming out of a door marked PRIVATE, had a vendetta look in his eye. "Ransom, I should have myself, so help me, committed for letting you talk me into using that idiot. He —"

"Look, Strombetti." Ransom advanced belligerently. "What did you do to him?"

"Not a thing. Not a thing. When it's time for him to ring, he suddenly starts spouting Dante and flies away. I had to finish —"

"Why didn't you keep him there?" Ransom scowled. "It's all your fault for making me take the electrodes off. If you don't find him —"

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"Just a moment, old boy." MacTate stepped forward. "You see, Strombetti, the little fellow apparently lost his memory. Nothing intentional. Did you notice which way he flew?"

"He flew into the ventilating shaft. They had it apart to fix it and —"

"You don't happen to know where the other end is located?"

"The other *ends*, you mean. It's a labyrinth. I've just been in to check with the maintenance man. He says your 'little fellow' could be anywhere in the block by now."

MacTate went to a window and looked out at the skyscrapers clustered around the television building. He turned to Ransom. "Shall we start looking, old boy? We can take two buildings at a time. One apiece. He's bound to have flown into a window somewhere."

They managed to cover almost a quarter of a floor each before the offices closed for the evening. "My God, MacTate," said Ransom as they went back to the University, "who would ever think there was so much red tape in little offices like that? Those detective agencies. They don't like anybody looking for things but themselves."

"I hit the teachers' agencies," said MacTate. "— I say, old boy. Why don't you hire a detective agency to help us?"

"I did."

Eventually Ransom reported that the agency had given up. "But I won't. There aren't many more buildings to cover. Besides, there's one place on a seventeenth floor I want to keep my eye on. Structural engineering place. The girl says her boss is a great genius that can't possibly be disturbed, and his partner, who talks to people, is in Europe."

"But, old boy, perhaps a bribe —"

"No, that's the point. She's never allowed in the inner sanctum herself. This genius dictates over the intercom."

"Hardly the type to adopt stray parrots."

"Well, you can't tell about those mad geniuses." Ransom scratched his nose. "A parrot that quotes Dante — I've even convinced Strombetti he missed a bet. Did I tell you? He agreed that if we got Worthington back and put the electrodes on him, he'd give him a job. Like those playback recorders they teach pronunciation with. You know. He figures it'll be simpler to use Worthington."

"Now all we have to do is get him back." MacTate smiled wryly. "Old boy, why don't we spend the rest of the morning trying to crack that inner sanctum of yours? If our efforts prove fruitless, we can try the other buildings this afternoon."

"All right. My feet hurt, too." Ransom sighed. "What shall we do? Get a couple of masks and revolvers?"

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MacTate smiled and shook his head. "The door might be locked from the inside. When does this genius start dictating through the intercom?"

Ransom frowned. "I don't know. What's that got to do with — Wait." He turned to his colleague with gleaming eyes. "I'm way ahead of you, MacTate. Listen. Let me do the talking. I've got the perfect story."

They went up to the seventeenth floor in question and entered an office containing one girl, chair, filing cabinet, and desk with typewriter and intercommunication unit, and nothing else.

The girl looked up. "Oh my God. Not you again." She pushed her horn-rimmed glasses up on her hair.

Ransom looked around the scantily furnished room. "You were expecting anybody else?" He pointed at a corner. "There was a small chair there last time. What happened? Finance company get tired waiting for your talking boss to come back?"

The girl pushed her hair up from her neck with both hands. "You'll never guess. Today he's talking. The Silent One. To *two* fellow men, no less. They took the chair in for the other one."

"It wouldn't by any chance be about a little green parrot that says *Quel* —"

"Look, daddy." She closed her eyes wearily. "Like I have reiterated to you 1000 times already, Mr. Andrielli could be keeping a whole menagerie or a harem even behind that oaken portal. I wouldn't know. All I do is sit here and listen for the oracular tones to issue from this instrument" — she tapped the intercommunication unit — "which —"

"Do you happen to know where these fellow men are from?"

She nodded. "That I could tell you. In fact, if I thought it was any of your business —"

"Suppose we guessed," said MacTate. "For instance, they couldn't be television programming men, could they?"

The girl's jaw dropped. "How —?"

"MacTate. You don't mean he's got it back? His memory?" Ransom was equally astonished.

"Luck, old boy. Attempt at logical elimination." MacTate pointed at the intercommunication unit. "Ask her when he usually turns the instrument on."

"I was about to say when interrupted," said the girl, "that this instrument —" She was interrupted again, by a click from the intercommunication unit. Her voice underwent a subtle change. "Yes, Mr. Andrielli?"

"Week ago," said the voice on the unit. "Letter from Fortitude Theatrical Agency re mental prodigy act. What salary quoted?"

"One moment, Mr. Andrielli." The girl opened a file drawer.

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Ransom cleared his throat and bent over the intercommunication unit. "But I tell you, young lady, we've *got* to see Mr. Andrielli. Matter of life or death. This green talking parrot that escaped from our laboratories is intensely radioactive. Since our geiger counters were able to trace him to this building, you can readily understand his radioactivity is of a degree that makes prolonged proximity —"

"Still looking, Mr. Andrielli." The girl clicked off the intercommunication unit and turned on Ransom with furious eyes. "What are you trying to do? Get me fired?"

"Cheer up, daughter. He might be relieved enough to give you a raise when he finds out he's uncontaminated." Ransom looked at his wristwatch. "I give him fifteen seconds."

Eleven seconds later the oaken portal flew open. Two frightened-looking gentlemen issued from it to dash past Ransom and MacTate and through the outer door. From the inner sanctum came a familiar voice. "What the hell do you think you're doing? Wait. Not out there. He's lying, I tell you. What if I was born in Oak R —"

There was a hoarse exclamation, then a loud clang, and then Worthington flapped out and lit on Ransom's shoulder. "Ransom. What's the idea lying like that? He was going to throw me out the window in a wastebasket. If I hadn't bit him before he got the scotch tape —"

"Look, Worthington." Ransom reached up, grabbed him firmly by the neck and stuck him under his coat. "You say another word till I get you home" — he followed MacTate out the door — "and I'll kill you."

Back on his crossbar perch in Ransom's office, Worthington bit his axilla, looked around the room, and cocked an eye at his rescuer. "What's eating you, Ransom? Aren't you glad to see me?"

MacTate sat down in front of the desk, thrust out his long legs and regarded his suffering feet. Ransom sat down behind it and took off his shoes.

"Sure. I'm glad to see you. But you've got such a big mouth, and I didn't want to get involved with this Andrielli." Ransom looked up. "Engineer with impresario instincts. What was he like, anyway?"

"He was all right, I guess. Till you convinced him I had deliberately plotted to radioactivate him, or whatever you call it."

"By the way, Worthington, when did your memory come back? After we took the electrodes off, it lasted just long enough for you to get on Strombetti's show and wreck it. We thought —"

"Strombetti?" Worthington chuckled reminiscently. "I remember him. Used to have words with him, didn't I? But listen, Ransom. You remember I asked you once if you would let a mathematically inclined parrot teach some of your classes, and you said —"

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"Don't worry about that any more, Worthington. Strombetti's agreed to give you a very interesting job. Here at the University. He needs —"

"Wait, Ransom. You're not following me. You see, this fellow Andrielli let me read these books he has in his office. I discovered I had mental powers I never dreamed of."

"*Italian* books? In an engineer's office?"

"No, no. All that went with the electrodes, I guess." Worthington hopped down on the desk and cocked an eye at a note pad. "Here's the sort of thing I learned. Take the digits in this phone number: 50667. Know what the cube root of that is?"

"Cube root?"

"Sure. It's 37 point —"

"Worthington!" Ransom sprang to his feet.

"But that's just elementary for me. Do you know what area of grass a cow can eat if it's tied by a ten-foot rope to the outside of a circular fence six feet in —"

"Worthington. No —"

"Even that's not very hard. I can do them transcendental, too. And since you promised you'd give me a job —"

"Oh God. MacTate." Ransom turned anguished eyes to his colleague. "Logic. Symbolic logic. What do you say?"

MacTate sighed comfortably. "Sorry, old boy. His talents seem to go far beyond that sort of thing."

Ransom stared glassily at the far wall. "There's just one chance. Convolution of Broca." He tore open a desk drawer and began to rummage in it with convulsive desperation. "What did I do with those damned electrodes. . . ."

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Critic and scholar Ben Ray Redman is best known to readers of popular fiction for one ironic and flawless short story, "The Perfect Crime," which Ellery Queen has justly labeled The Detective Story to End All Detective Stories. (If that sounds ambiguous, read the story itself in Queen's 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT *and see why the description fits precisely.) Now Mr. Redman once more approaches the theme of murder, this time in a disturbing mood of pure horror.*

At the Door

by BEN RAY REDMAN

TIM LOOKED at his watch and then reached again for the bottle beside the bed. It wouldn't be long now. He began to think he might be getting a little drunk. He hoped he was.

The electric sign across the street flashed on and off. When it turned red it splashed color over the walls of the room — the color of blood — and the white shirt, hanging from a chair, picked up the stain. Tim rolled off the bed and yanked at the shade. Then he lay down again. Somehow it seemed a little better when he was lying down. But not much better. If only he could be sure that Mary didn't think he had run out on her — left her to take the rap! But he couldn't be sure. How could he?

He went over the whole story, again and again; but his brain was heavy behind his eyes. For a moment he almost dozed off. Then, with a start, he grabbed at his watch, and cursed at what he saw. Ten past 11! It was all finished, and he hadn't even known when it was 11. After waiting so long, he hadn't even known when the moment came. It was finished. Mary was dead.

He felt as if every drop of blood had left his body, as if he had stopped breathing. He was numb with a numbness he had never known before. It seemed to him that the city was suddenly silent, as though the earth itself had quit turning on its axis. Then he felt the beating of his heart again, faintly at first, then stronger and stronger, louder and louder, until it was pounding angrily against the bars of its cage. But its pounding did not make him deaf to the light tap that came on the door — the quick da-de-de-da knock that he knew so well. But he had to hear it twice before he could believe that he was really hearing it. Blindly, still hardly daring

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to believe, he rolled from the bed and reached for the door and opened it. The room behind him was dark and the bare bulb at the end of the hall was dim, but Mary's face was as clear to him as if they had been standing on a sunlit beach. Then she was in his arms.

Between kisses his questions stumbled over one another, but she stopped them with more kisses. When the door was closed and locked, in the darkness of the room, he begged, almost fought for an explanation, but all she would say at first was "Shush, my dear, shush," and then, over and over again, holding him fast, she said, "Poor Tim, poor Tim."

Now he wished that he hadn't drunk so much, that he hadn't drunk anything at all. If only his head were clear, perhaps he could understand. But how could he understand, if Mary wouldn't answer his questions? He was sure only of this — she was alive, in the same room with him, touching him, holding him tight, loving him as she had always loved him, as he had loved her. But he had to be sure of one other thing, so he kept on asking the same question, saying it half-a-dozen ways, but always coming back to the same point: "You know I didn't run out on you, Mary? You do know it, don't you? You do know I'd never do a thing like that, Mary? You do know I'd never let you down?" And for a while she kept on repeating, "Poor Tim, poor Tim." But at last she said: "Yes, I know, Tim dear. I know all about it, darling. You mustn't worry about it, Tim. You mustn't. I know, darling, I know." And she kissed him on the eyes and on the mouth, and patted his hair smooth on the back of his head, just the way she had done so many times before, and he was happy — happy for the first time since that terrible night when he had lost his head and killed, when he had never meant to kill.

She must have known it, for she said: "You are happy, aren't you, Tim darling?" He said, "Yes, Mary. Yes, Mary dear." And after that their bodies spoke for them, and a little later they slept, still in each other's arms.

Yet when he woke it seemed as if he had not slept at all, as if time had stopped. But the morning sunlight was finding its way past the edges of the shade. Time had not stopped.

Tim sat up with a groan. His head was in agony. But that hardly mattered now. No headache lived forever. There was so much to be explained. There were plans to be made. He looked down at Mary, dim in the half-light. She had turned away from him in her sleep; she lay with her back towards him, on the crumpled sheets. Softly he slid from the bed. Softly he raised the shade, letting in the sunlight. Silently he turned to wake her with a kiss. Then he saw what at first he could not believe, what he could not understand, but what, in an instant, he could understand only too well, even though belief still recoiled upon itself.

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He saw where the top of her head had been shaved, and the ugly red blotch where her hair had been. He looked down and saw another fiery mark on her leg, where electricity had set its burning seal. He looked for her face, and he found a mask, twisted by shock, fixed in a pattern of horror, from which dead eyes stared wildly. He clutched at the window sill for support. Then he heard the knocking on the door. But this time it was no light, brisk tapping. He knew what it was.

They had come for him at last. He had always been sure that they would come, sooner or later, and now they were here. He was glad it was over.

Unsteadily he took the few steps that brought him to the door. Dazed, he turned the key in the lock, turned the knob, pulled the door wide. The bare bulb was still glowing faintly at the end of the hall, but there were no policemen, no detectives standing in the hall. There was no one there at all.

Tim leaned against the door, trying to understand. Then, desperately, he turned his eyes towards the bed. There was no one lying on the bed. There was nothing on the bed but the untidy sheets. And now, finally, he knew the truth.

They had not come for him. No one was ever going to come for him, no matter how long he waited. He was always going to be alone, as long as he lived. Alone with himself — and his last memory of Mary.

Tim began to laugh, a faint, dry, rattling laugh. The sunlight was bright in the room.

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For more than twenty years, since "The First Martian" appeared in Amazing Stories *in 1932, Eando Binder has been one of the most celebrated by-lines in American science fiction. As all students of the early days know, it first represented the collaboration of two brothers, E[arl] and O[tto] Binder, and was later adopted by the prolific Otto alone for countless stories including the famous Adam Link robot series. But for the past ten of those twenty years, the Binder name has almost never been seen in a science fiction magazine; instead Otto has devoted his fabulously fertile imagination to plotting the comic-book adventures of Captain Marvel and the Marvel Family. (Suggestion to all of you with comic-book readers in the family: You can't find a better introduction to the standard themes of science-fantasy than the Marvel series — plus touches of tongue-in-cheek satire that will delight you while your offspring revel in the straight adventure element.) Now, comfortably settled in the House That Marvel Built, Binder is writing fiction again; and we're pleased to bring you this adroit combination of a very real present-day problem with an unexpected variant on a noted André Maurois thesis.*

A Warning to the Furious

by EANDO BINDER

FIRST THEY thought it was Russia.

In America, that is.

That was on June 3, 1954, at 8:05 A.M., when the first of the strange radioactive bombs dropped within the borders of the USA. Just a scattered few that morning, landing haphazardly here and there, mostly in open fields, hitting no important targets.

The enemy didn't have the range yet.

But by noon, one had dropped in the heart of New Orleans, spreading its deadly rays. It was noticed from the start what peculiar bombs they were — "bombs" only for lack of a more specific name. They were large obloid drums of metal, about 50 feet wide, looking somewhat like eggs flattened at both ends. Egg bombs they were quickly labeled, by the slogan-tracked American mind. Also atomic eggs.

Actually, they were not atomic bombs at all, as quickly became apparent.

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They did not explode with a devastating blast, leveling half a city. Oddly, they landed with no more than a meteoric thump and cracked open like eggshells, spraying their lethal contents far and wide. Something like an incendiary bomb.

But with far more death-dealing power, for the contents were "hot," extremely so. They were a mass of material radioactive to a violent degree.

The material itself was peculiar — a mixed lumpiness of organic as well as metallic matter, which seemed vaguely to resemble broken-down parts of manufactured articles of many kinds. It was as if anything at hand, any old thing, had been turned "hot" and crammed in. It made one think of Civil War cannon primed with nuts and bolts and nails and chains.

In New Orleans, where the first atomic egg bomb hit its target city, many nearby people instantly received fatal burns. Then, as the deadly debris lay scattered up and down the street, the radiations contaminated the air. And the air circulated up one street and down the next, aided by a brisk Gulf breeze.

Radioactive air, poisonous. Lungs taking one breath of it were doomed. And so it went, a wind of death sweeping along, claiming victims for a slow, agonizing, lingering death — slow but nonetheless sure.

"Those Red Fiends!" screeched one woman, already retching blood. "Atom bombs would be more merciful. They've discovered a horrible new weapon!"

"Give it back to them!" raged a man, who had stepped directly on a portion of radioactive debris with his foot, and knew he was marked for the grave. "The dirty back-stabbers! Communist madmen! Give it back to them!"

And that's what Washington was already in the process of doing, within a week, mobilizing swiftly for retaliation to this monstrous sneak attack.

This undeclared atomic war.

In Russia, they thought it was America.

At 4:52 P.M. of that same day of June 3, 1954, the first bomb hit Russia, up near the Finnish border. That was 4:52 New Orleans time. It was 7:47 A.M. Moscow time. An hour later, one egg bomb had landed in the outskirts of Archangel. The Russians too were astonished at these "soft" bombs that were designed not to explode and destroy, but to sneak and destroy.

And it mystified them too that the lethal fillings of the bombs were a species of "junk," rather than a specific homogeneous fission byproduct. Everything was in them including the kitchen sink. One had ceramic pieces of a sink within.

They were startled, the Russians, for they had expected — in case of war

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— all of America's awesome mind-horrifying repertory of atomic bombs and hydrogen bombs and whatever else those brilliant mad-dog capitalist pigs had stockpiled.

"Unsocialized Yankee plutocrats!" cursed a stricken Soviet citizen, and she could think of no worse revilements. "They invented something more awful than the hydrogen bomb!"

"Give it back to them!" screamed a dying male Marxist. "They struck without warning! Inhuman! How did they beat us to it? Give it back to them!"

And that's what the Politburo was hastily scrambling to do in the next week, mobilizing all out to smash back at this inhuman sneak attack from decadent America, which must somehow have gotten wind of their own planned sneak attack of the following year.

No, the atomic war did not start two seconds later, with bombs dropping on Washington and Moscow, respectively. It took a week even to think of starting, in spite of all popular conceptions of instantaneous warfare at the drop of a hat — or hate. A week to begin allocating atom bombs, wheeling out planes, planning the first tactical thrust, and all the other immensely complex details of global war.

A week.

And that was a blessing.

Meanwhile, the egg bombs kept dropping from the skies. Presumably they were guided missiles of extreme long range, shot halfway around the world through the stratosphere. And more and more of them were starting to hurt, hitting populous and industrial areas, spreading their silent death.

Some of these later bombs were filled with pieces and shreds of what seemed to be cloth and leather. In fact, it could be guessed by then that no two bombs ever had exactly the same physical contents, which might range from chips of metal to a pile of wood kindling. The one common denominator was that every load of the queer mish-mash was a miniature atomic pile operating at a furious rate of fission. Since by theory all matter known in the universe was potentially radioactive, under the proper manipulation, it didn't matter *what* matter was stuffed in the bombs. But no wit dared speak that deadly pun aloud.

It seemed the start of a savage and frightful atom war that might scourge civilization off the face of the Earth, victor along with vanquished. It was all a dread pattern, long expected and long hoped against, that sickened every soul around the planet.

But thoughtful minds were already seeing that it was not quite the ex-

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pected pattern. That somehow, two and two added up to a mystifying, mocking five. That it was a square peg in a round hole. Or even in a hole that didn't exist.

"Look," said Dr. Raymond Schaulk, atomic scientist, at Atomic Plant X in Nevada. He was in charge now of the stockpile of A and H bombs pouring out. "First, our press is screaming at the fiendish 'new weapon' the enemy is using. Radio Moscow screams, in the same pitch, at our use of the *identical* new weapon."

"It's a lie of course," snapped Major General Leonard R. Knox, Jr., who was the military chief sent to expedite the procedures at this atomic arsenal. "Typical Soviet smoke-screen tactics. Accusing us of using the same weapon they are hurling at us, claiming we used it first. Putting the onus on us."

"But that's the point," said Schaulk. "They *didn't* say we used it first. They reported the first bomb almost nine hours *after* ours."

The general's eyes widened. "Incredible! How could they make that stupid mistake? They left themselves wide open for the label of aggressor, in the eyes of the whole world!"

"Second," went on Schaulk, "and even more peculiar: The attack on America ended abruptly, that first day, *before* the attack on Russia began . . . nine hours later. Then the bombing of Russia ceased completely, before America was the target again, some fifteen hours *later*. Add nine and fifteen and you get twenty-four."

"Twenty-four hours? Why, that's a day."

"Exactly, General. And that pattern has been followed for a week now. First America attacked — then Russia — always *alternately*. What's more, the bombing attacks have only hit the southern states, from New Orleans northeast to Savannah, Georgia. Why the south, instead of the key industrial north? And in Russia, the line of bombs has gone only through the latitude of Archangel — *northern* Russia — on up northeast again out into the Arctic Circle."

"Our south and Russia's north," mused the general, gnawing it over. "The *least* important areas — from a war standpoint — of both nations. That *is* odd."

"And not only America and the USSR got it," Schaulk continued pedantically. "But all points *between*. England reported some. Ships in the Atlantic also observed egg bombs dropping in mid-ocean, harmlessly — I might say, wastefully. After Russia, Australia always gets a few, and many South Pacific islands, before we get bombed again. All as regular as clockwork, each twenty-four hours."

The general lit a cigarette with a slight tremor to his fingers. "Go on,

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Schaulk. You're driving at something. That path of bombs around the world —"

"Yes, a great circle," nodded Schaulk. "It cuts from America up to Latitude 75 degrees in Russia, always northeast. From there, it covers bleak northern wastes, passing near the North Pole. Twelve hours later, that path has cut past the South Pole and keeps slanting up northeast through Australia, the South Seas and back to America. In short, those egg bombs are creating a routine clockwork swath of destruction across the face of Earth, in time with Earth's *rotation*."

"I hate to hear the rest, Schaulk," said the General, unaware of cigarette ashes dropping in his lap, "but let's have it, cold turkey."

"Those bombs aren't coming from the Soviets. And we never made any. Those bombs are coming down from space."

Schaulk's monotone voice — he had been a teacher for long years at one time — put no emphasis on the last word. But it had more impact than any atomic bomb, several demonstrations of which General Knox had seen, and felt.

"Proof," said the general, forcing himself calm. "Any real proof, Schaulk?"

The scientist didn't change his tone, dry as ever, his shell intact. "For the first time in my life, I wished my calculations to be wrong. But they weren't. Several radar posts tagged the bombs coming down, at my request. They came down not like rocket-driven missiles but like high-speed meteors. In short, under the force of gravity, like falling stones. From the radar reports, at wide points, I plotted their trajectory back into space. It was a hyperbola, General."

The General hated the word instantly, even though he wasn't quite sure of its meaning, and raised his eyebrows.

"Hyperbola," lectured Schaulk. "A curve that never meets itself, and therefore has no Earthly origin. Any missile from Russia to America or vice versa would be a ballistic parabola, within Earth's gravitational field. The hyperbola is the proof, General, I'm sorry to say."

The scientist had to admire the officer. He took it without too much shock, though coming like this, it must have hurt — hurt bad. To know that the enemy was out in space. An enemy that was probably ten times more powerful and scientific and ruthless and alien than the one across the sea.

An *inhuman* enemy.

Not figuratively. Literally.

The general jumped up, but not because the cigarette was burning his fingers.

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"Moscow," he stammered in a sort of bewildered panic. "We've got to contact Moscow . . . tell them the truth . . . stave off our ghastly mutual error. . . ."

For the first time, Schaulk smiled.

"Come now, general. In spite of what we think of Red Russia politically, they are not mentally backward or blind. Their own scientists, top grade and plenty of them, must be figuring it all out for themselves by now. It's as plain as a nose on a face. As conspicuous as a sore thumb. They can add two and two and get the same staggering five we did. I wouldn't worry about that Atom War starting between America and Russia now."

It didn't.

The Red Fiends put out feelers by radio to Europe and America. The Capitalistic Pigs quickly took it up. After a somewhat involved, cautious, face-saving interchange of stiff notes, Washington and Moscow absolved each other of all blame for the ruthless sneak attack with the egg bombs.

Russia even apologized in that since they had never perfected such bombs, how could America have stolen the secret from them, as with all other prior Soviet pioneering? It reduced to absurdity thusly, at least on the propaganda level. America in turn paid the high compliment that the USSR was far too smart to err on the timing of early reports, putting America on record as first attacked. Clever Russians just never made such gross blunders. It was the only magnanimous thing to admit.

And so, the first embryo Atomic War died stillborn, and it can be surmised that nobody mourned, really.

"Decadent space swine!" shrilled *Pravda* in its next issue. "They are the brutal enemy, probably from some capitalistic planet of plutocrats, hiding behind a false democratic front."

"Back-stabbers of another world!" headlined the outraged American press. "Their methods are all too familiar, and it is feared they are under some police-state regime, perhaps seeking to collectivize the solar system."

However, despite their difference of opinion as to who or what the mutual enemy was, another series of notes flew between Moscow and Washington — and London, Paris, Bonn, Peking, Tokyo. An emergency general assembly of the UN was quickly called. In a surprisingly accelerated session, with the word veto not even mentioned, an alliance was formed to face the enemy with a common front. An alliance that soon included every nation or state or principality on Earth, unanimously, as they all insisted on the right to join, above and beyond the UN.

"What else?" chuckled one newspaper columnist in the USA, who could see a sardonic humor in it all. "For once we have a united Earth, a one-

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world, a dream of brotherhood come true, all dedicated to a great and noble cause — to butcher the enemy in space. We had it in us all the time, us humans, to forget our hates and fears, of each other. All it took was somebody else to hate and fear. Simple, isn't it?"

And so, Earth girded itself in unity for the invasion from space, obviously due.

But just who or what was the enemy? Which planet in hitherto sterile space, according to theory? Whom were we fighting, exactly? Moon men? Bums from Mars? Gooks from Pluto? Bloody blokes from Saturn? Espèces de chou de Mercure? Schweinehünde von Ganymede?

Meanwhile, the egg bombs kept dropping in increasing numbers. It began to build up into the proportions of a barrage, a deluge. Or it came more and more to seem like a frightful meteor shower, plunging down in an endless horde.

As Earth turned, under the bombsights of the faraway enemy, it was lashed by the circle of death.

Planes and anti-aircraft shot down what they could, but then it was seen what a devilish weapon this was. If they had been mere exploding bombs, the gunfire would simply detonate them safely, high in the air. But these bombs, even when struck by high-caliber shells, simply accomplished their original purpose, bursting open and spraying down their lethal loads of smoldering atomic matter. And nothing could stop or gather that up, in mid air. Nothing could hold back the rain of slow-fissioning scraps of all variety that came down like a cloudburst from Hell's junkyard.

In fact, the public began to complain that shooting them was worse, since the spray then spread over a wider area. There were more and more black areas on the map now, ringing Earth, which were marked with that grim finality: EVACUATED, CONTAMINATED.

Was that the space enemy's strategy? To continue this infernal bombardment for days — weeks — months? Perhaps *years*. For the enemy must know that Earth had no space ships with which to go on the offensive. The enemy could leisurely and comfortably continue to bomb the helpless target planet as long as they wished. Maybe they hoped, in ten or twenty years, to wipe out mankind, or at least his civilization. Then how simple to wait a suitable number of years or decades till the radioactive poisons finally dissipated, and then come and take over antiseptic Earth, against no slightest opposition.

And bones, human as well as animal, make good fertilizer.

It was all quite obviously an ingenious, horrible, long-range plan for winning Earth without any blood spilled — from the enemy's veins . . . if, indeed, those veins carried blood.

And Earth, without any space ships, could only sit and take it.

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"Ghastly," said General Knox to Dr. Schaulk. The latter was now in charge of getting all the useless, unneeded atom bombs and their brethren back into the stockpile, with the general expediting this reversal, suppressed fury in his eye.

"How can we fight *that* strategy?" the general appealed. "Earth is a sitting duck. We've got enough A-bombs to blast that other world flat — if only we could *get* there. That's what's driving me mad, insane."

A faint ray of hope flavored his next words.

"Of course, UE started Project Space. All United Earth is pooling its money and brains to achieve space travel. Just like the Manhattan Project came up with the original atom bomb. But —"

He ground his teeth before he went on.

"But even the most optimistic experts estimate five years before we launch workable manned spaceships. Five years of egg bombs raining down, day and night. Thousands dying by the hour. Cities and industrial areas steadily going black on the map, as the enemy shifts his sights all over. That black spreading cancerously over the face of the Earth. The wheels of civilization slowing down, inexorably. A race against methodical, merciless attrition by the enemy. Time! We won't have time enough! Schaulk, I'm telling you. *Not enough time!*"

Schaulk had the slightest tinge of amusement in his dusty voice. "You sound as if you're appealing to me, general. To perhaps invent some kind of machine to slow down time, or stretch it out. Sorry. I wish I could be a story-book scientist hero and save the world. But I'm just a real scientist, as helpless as you."

The general had his control back then, looking as dapper as ever.

"Sorry, Schaulk, if I sounded childish about it for a moment. Somehow, we humans — I like that expression, *we humans* — always expect a champion to show up in the nick of time. The Prince on the White Charger. The hero who will save the world, like in the story-books. Hangover from childhood, I suppose. But I'm a big boy now. I can face the truth. I know that nobody can save Earth. We all know it, we humans, every last one of us. *We humans* . . . we come to that . . . too late. Dammit all anyhow . . . too late."

"You think the human race is finally united — in soul — by this threat from the stars?"

"I do believe it," said the general, in a kind of humbleness. "I think it's worked a miracle. It has in me. This uniform I wear . . . it looks so *tawdry* now . . . so pointless. If this same revolution in spirit is going on around the world . . . but *too late*, dammit!"

"I suppose in a way, though," mused Schaulk, "I will save the world. Yes, I guess you might think of it that way."

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Jolted out of his own introspection, the general discarded several attitudes in the next moment, and adopted the only reasonable one.

"I'll bite, Schaulk. What's the punch line?"

"I just told you," Schaulk said mildly. "If I wore heavy horn-rimmed goggles now, I'd squint at you myopically and tell you to sit down and then whip out my amazing weapon or invention, or the spaceship I worked up during lunch hours and just finished this morning. But I have nothing startling to show you or tell you except that I guess I will save the world after all, in a manner of speaking."

The general went through sudden anger at being made a fool of. He went through pitying suspicion, that Schaulk's mind had cracked. He went through scathing scorn at the man's obvious melodramatics coated by mild understatement. All that flashed through him.

And then the general did the one thing he had tried most to avoid, jumping up like an eager child, yelling, "Schaulk! You're serious — dead serious! You *have* a way to save us."

"No," said Schaulk, more dryly than ever. "You've got it all wrong. You see, what I mean is . . . but here. Come along. I want to show you something."

Silently, a bundle of volcanic tenseness, the general followed the tall, robust scientist through the corridors of the vast atomic plant and outside to another isolated building. Inside, men in ray-proof leaden-woven suits handled large masses of materials of all kinds, packing them away.

Schaulk pointed through the observation window. "The junkyard we call it. Apparatus that gets too 'hot' after constant use in the atomic labs. Clothing contaminated beyond the danger point. Dregs and sludges and waste-products from the radioactive crucibles. All junk that has to be gotten rid of. Or call it garbage. Radioactive garbage."

The general nodded, impatiently. "Dangerous stuff, of course. You can't just toss it aside carelessly, like ordinary junk or garbage. You have to bury it deep in the ground."

"This has been one of the major problems of atomic science since it began in 1945," Schaulk went on. "We bury it deep all right, embedded in concrete too. Also we first seal it up in metal drums. Presumably, that keeps any radioactive rays from leaking up to the surface of the ground."

"Presumably?"

"We tested some burial places recently, out in the desert. Hot stuff buried as long as eight years ago. It's still hot — and leaking up. Vegetation withered all around. Bleached bones of coyotes. It'll stay hot too for — oh, 25,000 years, to be conservative. Radioactivity, once started, takes a long long time to die out. Actually, though it will diminish gradually through

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eons of time, it's immortal, reaching to the end of eternity. As witness the stars, atomic furnaces themselves."

"Damn eternity," said the general. "We're concerned with this here now piece of time. What about that leakage?"

"At my urging not so long ago," Schaulk said unhurriedly, "we buried the stuff at sea. Sunk it miles deep to the ocean floor in weighted containers. But I now seriously doubt if even that is safe. Eventually those containers will rot away, exposing the ocean water to radioactive contamination. I've already warned Washington that our children or grandchildren may curse us for killing all the fish at sea."

The general pondered that. "You can't bury it, or sink it in the sea. Nothing else helps, such as mere burning or chemical treatment. Then what *can* you do with it? How *can* you get rid of that atomic garbage, safely? What's *left?*"

"An interesting question," Schaulk conceded. But he changed the subject as he led the general back to his office. "You of course have heard the strange news about the *contents* of the egg bombs from space, that they are filled with apparatus, junk, clothing, dregs of all kinds — all radioactive."

"At last you get to the point," exploded the general, his mind seizing it keenly. "So that's it! The space enemy found a *real* use for his atomic garbage, simply loading it in the egg bombs and hurling them into space toward Earth. Of all the humiliating . . ." The general gagged. "Earth defeated, wiped out, by an amazing new weapon of the space enemy composed of *garbage!* We get licked by garbage, atomic junk. Did you *have* to tell me this? And is this your big denouement —?"

But again the general's mind lanced ahead. He grabbed the scientist by the arm, ecstatically.

"Schaulk! Now I see. So genius hides behind that football player's hulk of yours. That's how you'll save us, or show us the way — by hurling *our* garbage back at them! Fight fire with fire!" The general's tongue could hardly keep up now. "We have no spaceships but we won't *need* them. We've got unmanned rockets. In a few weeks — months — we'll cook up rockets able to shoot free of Earth's gravitation. We've *got* to now. It's the *way!* Sure, we thought of unmanned rockets with atomic *bomb* warheads . . . only the experts said that was as ticklish a problem as spaceships. To keep atomic warheads from exploding on takeoff meant in itself years of research. But sending off this non-explosive atomic garbage is duck soup. Within a year we can start off our garbage barrage at them . . . haha! . . . yes, if that's what they want, we'll give it to them . . . *The Garbage War!* That's funny, Schaulk. Funny and glorious and thank heaven, amen!"

It was queer, how the general could laugh in one breath and then end on

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that solemn word, with all his soul in it, and with unashamed tears making furrows down his cheeks. It was not till later that he even thought of wiping them away.

"The Garbage War," repeated Schaulk, and there might have been a faint chuckle in his flat nasal voice. He shrugged. "Too bad. Pity, really. That would have been jolly, if it came to that. You can tell the joke at the Officer's Club later, and milk it for all it's worth, but there won't be any Garbage War, General."

The general's voice reverted to a top-sergeant's roar, in his unbelieving dismay. "Dammit all, man! If you wore a military uniform I'd have you courtmartialed and shot at sunrise for this. Now you say we are *not* going to hurl our atomic garbage back at the enemy? We're just going to sit back and let them fling it in our face —?"

"But they aren't flinging their atomic garbage at us," said Schaulk, neatly ripping apart the whole fabric previously built up in the general's mind, leaving him hung up with an idiotic expression.

A dozen questions leaped in the general's mind then, but got jammed at the exit, and all that came from his lips was a meaningless garble.

"By the way," said Schaulk, "we traced the original trajectory back to Saturn, we think, although that point may never be cleared up."

So the enemy is up on Saturn, thought the general, *how far away? . . . 800,000,000 miles or so? . . .*

"Anyway," Schaulk was saying. "I'm glad it happened in a way, since it will convince Washington that my new plan is the *only* feasible one. Namely, to shoot our atomic garbage in space rockets straight at the *sun*. That's the one and only really safe place to get rid of it, in that giant incinerator, as it were."

Schaulk was tuning the radio in his office now, and nodded in satisfaction as a choking announcer choked it out. "UE flash! No egg bomb has been reported dropping on Earth for the past three hours. Nowhere on Earth! What does it mean —?"

Schaulk snapped it off.

"He'll find out in time, and the rest of the world. Simple enough, as you can easily see, general. Earth finally moved along far enough in its orbit to get out of range of all those millions of egg barrels of atomic garbage floating in space."

"Barrels?" echoed the general.

"Did I leave something out?" returned Schaulk. "Oh yes, of course. If only those ancient dead Saturnians hadn't been so *careless*, scattering their atomic garbage into the dumping ground of space. Criminal of them. They didn't look ahead, or didn't care perhaps — that their barrels would of

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course take up long-period orbits around the sun, like comets and swarm meteors, and keep intersecting the orbits of other planets, time after time. And that sooner or later, by cosmic mischance, some planet would get in the way. However, it's a good lesson to us not to let our atomic sins visit the heads of non-terrestrial people in the far future . . . did I mention that test of the egg-barrel casings indicated they may have floated in space for some 15,000 years? So now you see the whole picture clearly, General."

"I — I do?"

"Good. And you see now," Schaulk finished, his dry voice driest of all, "why I couldn't claim to be saving the world at all, except in a sort of left-handed way, by first adding up all the clues and realizing that —"

An atomic bomb burst in the general's mind, anticipating those final concussive words.

"— that there never was any space enemy making war on us in the first place."

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